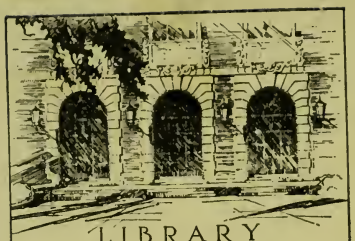
THE VILLAGE COMEDY.

MORTIMER AND FRANCES COLLINS.



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THE VILLAGE COMEDY.

VOL. III.

THE VILLAGE COMEDY.

BY

MORTIMER AND FRANCES COLLINS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1878.
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LONDON:
PRINTED BY DUNCAN MACDONALD, BLENHEIM HOUSE,
BLENHEIM STREET, OXFORD STREET.

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THE VILLAGE COMEDY.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT THE VILLAGE SAID.

No might nor greatness in mortality
Can censure 'scape; back-wounding calumny
The whitest virtue strikes. What king so strong
Can tie the gall up in the slandrous tongue.

Measure for Measure.

MR. TEMPLE departed for town next morning, with Leonora and Kate, leaving a letter in the post-office directed to Mrs. Marston Sebright.

This letter, and also the Rev. Vypar Voyd, reached Ashton Minima the next day.

"My dear Mr. Voyd, I owe you a thousand thanks for all you have done," said Mrs. Sebright. "You have been the salvation of my boy. See this note from Mr. Temple. He evidently understands what is the matter, and is removing his daughter out of Jack's way. How very sensible he must be."

"Most sensible," said the vicar, as he read the note, which ran as follows:

"MADAM,

"I understand that you wished a message conveyed to me through the Rev. Vypar Voyd, concerning the acquaintance between your son and my daughter. They met at the house of my friend Mr. Frowde, and no doubt the *badinage* usual amongst young folk has passed between them. But that there is nothing serious so far as my daughter is concerned I am certain, as she

confides everything in me. I need scarcely remark that no reliance should be placed on village gossip.

"I am compelled to be away from home for some little time, so your anxiety regarding your son may be allayed so far as my daughter is concerned.

"I am, Madam,

"Your obedient servant,

"WILLIAM TEMPLE."

"Most sensible, indeed," repeated the vicar, as he read the note a second time, for his brain did not take it all in at first. "I thought I should succeed in showing him how necessary it was to interfere. He has evidently taken her away on purpose. I found him rather difficult to persuade at first; but I used my best endeavours —my very best endeavours—I can assure you, Mrs. Sebright."

"And I am most grateful to you," replied the lady. "I can never repay you."

The vicar remained some time. He did not tell Mrs. Sebright of his mistakes of the previous day; but he did tell her a great deal about what he termed the "excessively unbecoming conduct of Miss Temple." It was agreed that Kate was got out of the way just in time, as Jack was expected home shortly with the doctor, who was asked to stay at Ashton Minima for a couple of days on his way to town.

The vicar went home rejoicing. He had been half afraid of the result of an interview between Temple and Mrs. Sebright; but that letter was all he could wish.

And now gossip was more rife than ever in the village.

Miss Temple had "done something wrong, and was suddenly taken away by her father," was the current report, and "not to

be wondered at when the father was no better than he should be," said some; and young Mr. Sebright was "mixed up with it," or Mr. Frowde, or Mr. Forncett, or all of them, according to some.

This was the talk amongst the lower classes, and amongst as much of the upper as condescended to that sort of thing.

But there was a grand buzzing amongst the upper classes, the small gentry, and clergy of the neighbourhood. The occupant of The Birches was positively a nobleman's son, they had just found out, and scarcely anyone had called on him. What had they all been doing not to know this? He was actually the Honourable Frank Forncett, and his card was not lying on any of their tables.

"How could I have made such a mistake?" said old Mrs. Ashley, who thought she had the peerage at her fingers' ends.

"Reach me 'Debrett,'" she said to her daughter, "and let us look it up."

"Here it is," she said, laying the book on her lap, and pointing to the name with one hand, while she carefully arranged her eye-glasses with the other. "'Forncett. Family name of the Earl of Ravensbourne.' Now let us turn to Ravensbourne. Here it is. 'Ravensbourne, Earl of. Charles Forncett, fourth Earl, born 1830. Brother living, Frank, unmarried.' Just take it, Patricia, my dear, and read it all out to me."

Her daughter took the volume, and read it out from beginning to end.

"Of course, now I remember all about it, but had forgotten the family name. Why, he married a second cousin of the second wife of Sir Watkin Ashley, of Protheli."

The Ashleys, who had in former times married into Welsh families, and had some

Welsh blood in them, were great at relationships, and could nearly always prove that they were in some way connected with any noble family that was mentioned.

"Patricia, my dear," she said to her daughter, "we'll leave cards."

And as Mrs. Ashley was considered to be the head of the very small country gentry who constituted what they were pleased to term "society" round Copse Hill, Frank Forncett was in a fair way to get into the exclusive set, supposing he wished to do so.

CHAPTER II.

AN ENTANGLEMENT.

ASTROLOGOS:

Pick up your thread.

ALOUETTE:

I did not know it fell, papa.

ASTROLOGOS:

How like a prosy talker, who, oblivious,
Lets fall his story's thread, and plodding ignorant,
Pursues his wordy way until entanglement
Breaks off his luckless speech.

ALOUETTE:

I'm sure such accident
Ne'er happens to a woman's conversation though.

The Comedy of Dreams.

DR. ONESIMUS SUTTON and the Rev. Marston Sebright are sitting over the dinner-table at Ashton Minima on a chilly

evening late in the autumn. Jack has left the "old boys," as he irreverently termed them, to enjoy their filberts and port and theology. But it is *not* theology they are discussing. Jack is with his mother in the drawing-room. He does not look happy, for the day before he left Devonshire he had a note from Mrs. Frowde, telling him of Kate's departure. He could not make out what this sudden movement meant. Kate had sent messages through Mrs. Frowde, in which she talked confidently of seeing him when he came home, and now she had suddenly gone, and did not seem to know when she would be back. There must be something wrong in it. Mrs. Sebright was in good spirits, not only at having her son back again, but because she imagined that any intercourse between him and Kate was effectually stopped. She talked cheerfully with him for some time, carefully avoiding

any mention of either Mr. Voyd or the Frowdes.

She questioned Jack about Devonshire and Dr. Sutton, but Jack only answered mechanically, and she found it difficult to keep up her cheerful tone.

After a few minutes' silence, Jack said—

"Has Mr. Voyd been here much, mother?"

"I think he has called three or four times while you were away, my dear. He always inquired most anxiously after you. He's a true friend of yours, Jack."

"I'm not so sure of that, mother."

"My dear boy, no one could be more anxious for your welfare than he is. Believe me, Jack, he is as anxious as myself about you."

"I should prefer a little less anxiety on his part," said Jack.

"Really, Jack, I'm afraid you are very

much altered. You used not to talk like this."

"When did he last come, mother?"

"About ten days ago, my dear."

"Oh!" said Jack, in a curious tone.

He was wondering whether that visit had anything to do with the departure of the Temples.

"I shall go over to Copse Hill when the doctor's gone," said Jack. "It won't do to go before, as I shall stay the night. The days are so short, and the lanes across there are probably bad, and Frowde will give me a bed, I know."

"Jack, my dear boy, do let me persuade you not to visit those people."

"You must let me judge for myself, mother. You know nothing about them but by hearsay: I know them well, and I know and feel that it is a privilege to have the friendship of such a man as Manly Frowde.

I should never have gone into the Church but for him. I am learning from him to distinguish truth from humbug, and honesty from hypocrisy, and I can say without hesitation that Mr. Voyd is a humbug."

Jack's voice had reached a tone of great indignation as he finished his sentence.

"Hush, hush, Jack," said his mother, "how can you use such language to me, and of such a man? Jack, you are making your mother very miserable."

She said this in so earnest a way that Jack felt remorseful. He went and stood over her and kissed her, and said,

"Dear mother, forgive me. I did not intend to hurt you. I cannot help feeling very strongly when I hear a weak man like Mr. Voyd passing judgment on a man like Frowde. But, mother, let us settle the question by appealing to my father. If he says it is advisable for me to give up the

acquaintance of the Frowdes, I will do so."

Mrs. Sebright did not want the matter referred to her husband. She had, acting on Mr. Voyd's advice, not mentioned the matter to him at all, and she always felt a little guilty about it, and dreaded the time when it might all come out; so she said,

"No, Jack, I see no use in doing that, because your father knows nothing of Mr. Frowde's private character. He only knows him as a public man. It is his private character unfits him for your society, and you are likely to make very undesirable acquaintances at his house. Jack—dear Jack—you used to be so different before you knew those people; you used to tell me everything, and now you scarcely ever talk to me. You cannot see what a difference has come over you. You never mention whom you meet when you go to see those

people, and that shows you are ashamed to do so."

"How can you say so, mother? You know I continually talk about the people I meet there, for I never meet any so nice anywhere else."

"But, Jack, who are those Temples you meet, that Mr. Voyd mentioned to you the last time you were home."

"Everybody knows Mr. Temple. I daresay if you ask father he knows all about him."

"Yes, my dear, his public character; but what of his private character?"

"Well, I suppose it is the same as other people's. I should say he was a very upright and severe man in private life. I know I feel rather frightened of him." Which was true, or he might have gone straight to him at first when he fell in love

with little Kate, and have saved her and himself much unhappiness.

"But what of Mrs. Temple?" said Mrs. Sebright.

"I have not the pleasure of knowing her," said Jack, "but hope to know her soon."

"I hope not," said Mrs. Sebright, with a shudder. "And Miss Temple?"

"She is the sweetest and brightest lady I ever met," said Jack.

"Oh! Jack, Jack, what are you saying? Do you know she is the common talk of the neighbourhood. Her name is in everyone's mouth in connection with several gentlemen: yourself amongst the number, I grieve to say, Jack."

"Mother," almost shouted Jack, "I cannot—I will not stand this, even from you. This is too much." And he got up, and walked excitedly out of the room. Mrs.

Sebright very soon followed him. She knew her son well, and she saw he was really upset. She threw down her knitting, and walked quickly upstairs. Her knitting cotton had become entangled in the fringe of a little shawl she had thrown over her shoulders; but in her anxiety she did not notice this, so she drew the thread all the way up with her. She went to Jack's door, but for the first time in her life she was refused admittance. She begged him to let her come in; but Jack would give no answer.

Meanwhile, Marston Sebright and Dr. Sutton, both comfortably filled with good port, left the dining-room and walked across to the drawing-room, which they did not enter with their usual dignity.

"Hallo! what's all this?" said Mr. Sebright, catching hold of the doctor to prevent himself from falling. "What's

happened? My feet are entangled in a cat's-cradle."

He looked round the room, so soon as he could get disentangled, and saw the knitting lying on the ground, and a paper and paper-knife which Jack had thrown down in the middle of the room. Mrs. Sebright hearing the noise, ran down, with a face that added to the general look of confusion. Mrs. Sebright was usually a very placid-looking woman. She would go on in the same regular way from one year's end to another. She was seldom out of temper, and scarcely ever changed the expression of her countenance. Therefore, when her husband saw her, he felt more astonished than ever, and said,

"What can be the matter, my dear? The doctor and I have had to make a most undignified entrance to this room. We found our feet surrounded by some

stringy material. I hope, doctor, I did not seriously inconvenience you?"

"Not at all," said the doctor.

"Jack is not very well," said Mrs. Sebright, "and has retired to his room. I went up to see if I could do anything for him, and unfortunately carried my knitting-thread entangled in my shawl. I'm so sorry, Dr. Sutton, to have so nearly caused you an accident."

"Don't mention it, madam."

"Jack ill!" said Mr. Sebright, "why, he seemed well enough at dinner. What is the matter?"

"Nothing more than a headache, I think; I daresay he will be well by the morning," said Mrs. Sebright.

But Mr. Sebright, who was unused to so much agitation in the house, could see that there was something more than a headache. He thought that the mother would not care

to make the doctor uncomfortable by showing too much anxiety, and he knew the boy would be safe in her hands, so he said nothing more about it.

Mrs. Sebright went to bed early, leaving her husband and Dr. Sutton in the drawing-room. As she passed her son's door, she asked once more to be allowed to come in; but she received no answer.

Later on, when Mr. Sebright had seen the doctor to his room, he went to his son's room, intending to open the door softly and have a look at him, as he had been accustomed to do every night when Jack was a boy, but he found the door locked.

"Jack's door locked! How very singular! He never used to lock it. My dear," he said, going into his bedroom, "the boy's door is locked!"

But Mrs. Sebright, having begun this bit of deceit with her husband, felt compelled

to go on, so she pretended to be asleep to avoid explanations, and Mr. Sebright got no answer to his remark.

CHAPTER III.

JACK INDIGNANT.

They say—quhat say they? Let them say.
Old Scottish Motto.

WHEN Jack shut himself in his room, he threw himself into a chair and held his head with both hands, as if he almost felt it was necessary to hold his reason in. The one woman in the world whom he loved above everything, who seemed so divine a creature to him that she was something more than a mere woman, was spoken of as a common creature, and that by his mother. The thought was too horri-

ble. For a few moments he hated his mother, and felt as if he would like never to look on her again.

He thought of his beautiful, innocent little Kate, who seemed so pure and good to him that he considered it sacrilege to think of her when not surrounded by congenial influences. He used to like to get out into the open country, where he could hear nothing but the song of birds and feel nothing but the presence of God, and think about Kate, and think and think till he almost fancied he had her spirit with him. Whenever he had any little annoyance, he used to fancy he could shake it off by getting away to "talk to Kate," as he called it. He had set her up as a divinity, and now his divinity was spoken of as the lowest of creatures.

He tossed his head about wildly, and then paced up and down the room, and then

again sank into the chair, and threw his strong body from one position to another, and seemed as if he would grasp at some imaginary foe. He wanted to exhaust his rage and strength on something, and knew not what. He felt his head burning and his mouth dry, and an intense desire to clutch at something with his hands. He opened the window and put his head out, and the cool air sobered him a little. Then he drank water and bathed his head, and sat down to try to think.

But it was a long time before he could think calmly. He called to his little Kate, and tried to imagine that she would come, in spirit, to help him, but every time he thought of her, he also thought of the vile accusations against her, and was wild with rage. He never doubted her for one moment. Then he tried to persuade himself to be calm and look at the matter quietly, and see what

was to be done, for perhaps Kate was herself suffering from the vile charges. The time was so near now that he could have gone to Mr. Temple and offered himself as a husband for Kate, and all this would now take away his chances. Lovers always exaggerate their difficulties, and it seemed to Jack that this was a very serious difficulty.

By the time that he had made up his mind what was the best thing to do under the circumstances, it was four o'clock. He wished it were light, that he might at once carry his resolution into effect, for he meant to start at daybreak and go to see Manly Frowde and tell him all about it, and ask his advice. He undressed, and tried to get a couple of hours' sleep, but it was impossible. At seven o'clock he turned out, went to the stables, and had Bessie out. He left a message for his mother that he hoped Dr. Sutton would excuse him, but he had a

severe headache from the railway journey of the day before, and had gone out for a long ride to shake it off. When this message was repeated at the breakfast table, Mr. Sebright looked as if he thought something unusual had happened, but he said nothing, as Dr. Sutton was present.

Jack found Manly Frowde just turned out of bed, feeding his pigeons and looking as happy and bright as ever, followed by his big dog.

"Here you are," said Jack, "looking as happy and well as ever, with your wife and dog by your side as usual, I was going to say, but I suppose the wife is not down yet."

"No, she is upstairs waiting to know the result of the post," and he produced a bundle of unopened letters and papers from his pocket.

"You always look so happy; you never

seem to have any difficulties in life. The world comes easily to you." He said this so sadly that Frowde guessed there was something the matter.

"Of course I'm happy," said Frowde. "Difficulties are plentiful enough with me, but then, they were made to be overcome, and there is a certain amount of pleasure to be derived from overcoming them. Aren't you happy also, my dear boy? or are you pining for your little lady-love, who has been carried away just as you have come to look after her? You'll be running away with her altogether, I suppose, soon."

But Manly Frowde saw that his pleasant chaff did not make Frank look less unhappy, and he inquired what was the matter. Jack told the whole story.

"Well," said Frowde, "I've a pretty little romance to tell you which will certainly relieve your mind a little, and give you an

opportunity of making an answer to your mother. My wife has been wishing to tell you for some time, as she knew it would interest you, but was waiting till you came."

He then related the history of the Temples.

"As to our little Kate," continued Frowde, "she is the purest and sweetest little woman in the world. I should like to know who has slandered her. If it's a man I'll horsewhip him. If it's a woman or a parson—well—" and he shrugged his shoulders.

"I fear it's a parson," said Jack.

"And I daresay the parson had it from a woman," said Manly Frowde.

"What had I better do?" said Jack.

"Talk to the missus about it, she understands these matters better than I do," Manly Frowde had great faith in his wife.

The result of a talk with "the missus"

was that Jack decided to tell his father of his engagement to Kate, so soon as Dr. Sutton should have left them.

Jack breakfasted at the Cottage, and was so cheered by his friends that he started home again in good spirits. Bessie found out the difference in her master, and as good spirits are catching, she cantered along gaily, and seemed by her manner to tell her master he need not despair, as everything was sure to come right in the end.

He arrived home early in the afternoon and found his mother alone, as Mr. Sebright and the doctor had gone out.

"Jack!" said his mother. "How could you leave the house in that way this morning without a word to me when you know what I suffered last night. I know where you have been. To those people again. You used to tell me everything once. Now you always go to them for consolation. I can quite under-

stand what Mr. Voyd means. They are fascinating, wicked people. They are separating a son from his mother. You are breaking my heart, Jack."

"My dear mother, do listen to me. I am no longer a boy, unable to judge for myself. There must come a time when I must use my own judgment. You are shut up here and see little of the world. You really know nothing of the Frowdes. You are influenced entirely by Mr. Voyd, who is, no doubt, a most zealous and estimable man, but he lets his zeal carry him too far occasionally, and he has an unfortunate habit of listening to and encouraging gossip. You reproach me, mother, for being influenced by the Frowdes, but I think I may reproach you for believing Mr. Voyd before you believe me."

"My dear Jack," replied his mother, "I am sure you don't thoroughly understand

Mr. Voyd's motives. He is as anxious for your welfare as I am."

"Excuse me, mother, I think I do understand Mr. Voyd's motives better than you do, probably, but we will not discuss them. We will suppose that he had the best intentions, and my welfare at heart, when he told you that the Frowdes were bad people, and the Temples were living in—well, what he termed, a breach of the Seventh Commandment. But in one case he has certainly made an unfortunate mistake, and, so far as my opinion goes, in the other also. Mr. Temple is divorced from his wife, and his sister, who is separated from her husband, lives under his protection."

"How very unfortunate for them," said Mrs. Sebright. "But of course Mr. Voyd does not know that, and he has probably good authority for what he asserted."

"His authority is probably some gossipping woman," said Jack.

"Well, my dear, I'm truly sorry for these people," said Mrs. Sebright; "but it's just as well not to be too intimate with them, for you know that sort of thing is not recognized in society, and it must materially alter their position."

"How intolerant you are, mother! It was for that reason they sought a quiet spot to settle in, where their troubles would not be known; but it seems they chose the very worst spot in the world, for with a gossip-loving parson, and a parish full of gossipping females, there's little chance for anyone to live in peace."

"Jack, it grieves me to think you misunderstand Mr. Voyd in this way," said Mrs. Sebright.

"It grieves me, also, mother, that you

misunderstand him. It is evident that we shall never agree in our estimate of him. It seems to me that it is he who is separating us, not the Frowdes. Manly Frowde is the last man in the world to cause any division in families. If everyone listened to his teaching, there would be no quarreling in the world at all. But don't let us quarrel, mother. I've something serious to say to you. Come and sit down by me, mother," and he took her hand tenderly, and drew her down by his side. "You know, mother, I have always loved you better than anyone else in the world. No rival has ever come between us—unless it's Mr. Frowde," he added, laughing.

His mother, pleased with this little speech, for she was passionately fond of him, looked happy, and seemed to forget all her previous annoyance.

"Yes, dear Jack," she said.

"Well, mother, I said just now there comes a time when a man must use his own judgment: there also comes a time when a man meets the woman that he will love better than his mother. That time has come with me."

"Jack!" faintly said his mother. The smiles had died away from her face, and she looked pale. But she remembered it was selfish to want to keep Jack all to herself, so she tried to look pleasant, and said, "And who is the fortunate woman?"

"Miss Temple, mother."

"Jack, it cannot, it must not be," said Mrs. Sebright, starting from her seat. "You are mad! She is the common talk of everyone."

"Mother, do not make me mad by saying such things. You have only the authority of Mr. Voyd."

"No, Jack, you are wrong. I have a

letter from Mr. Temple that I can show you."

"A letter from Mr. Temple?" said Jack, in great astonishment. "What can you mean, mother?"

"I mean that Miss Temple's conduct has been such that her father has found it necessary to remove her suddenly from the neighbourhood, and he has written to apologise for her conduct to you."

"Mother, what can you mean? Show it me, quick."

Poor Jack could hardly believe what he heard. There must be some dreadful mistake somewhere, he knew; but he could not make it out. While his mother went to fetch the letter, he was tormented with all sorts of fears. He never doubted Kate for a moment; but he wondered how much she knew of all this, and he pictured her suffer-

ing intensely, and yet he thought Mrs. Frowde would have known of it, and would have told him.

"Can Voyd have done all this?" he thought; "or is there some diabolical fiend at work?"

Mrs. Sebright placed the letter in his hands. He read it through with a look of wonder on his face. He re-read it.

"Good heavens, mother!" he exclaimed, "what have you been doing to call for such a letter as this? How can I ever dare to ask Mr. Temple for his daughter after that?"

"My dear Jack, you don't seem to see that what I have told you is true, and that Mr. Temple has found it necessary to remove his daughter."

"No, mother, I don't see it. What I do see is that Mr. Temple is a most perfect

gentleman, and that you have been communicating with him in some way, and that he has tried to save any unpleasantness to you or his daughter by removing her. Now I see why they have suddenly gone away. This is your saintly parson's doing. He's spoilt my life, at least, for of course Mr. Temple will never condescend to let his daughter marry me after this. A curse on all scandal-mongers!"

"Hush! Jack. Do be calm. Listen to me for a moment. There are other proofs —actual proofs—of Miss Temple's misconduct."

"Mother, I will not listen to anything more. I have made up my mind on the subject. I will lay the whole matter before my father at once."

"At least wait till Dr. Sutton has gone," said his mother.

Mrs. Sebright was dreading the time when Jack should appeal to his father. She wished she had never kept it secret from him from the first.

CHAPTER IV.

A CURTAIN CONVERSATION.

But the best education of a young man is neither Greek nor Latin nor geometry; it has nothing to do with the siege of windy Troy, nor with the

Persicos odi, puer, apparatus,

nor with that long-legged isosceles triangle that bumptiously bestrides the asses' bridge. It is what a woman gives him. Sometimes it is the mother—always would it be so if mothers were not so terribly like hens with broods of ducklings—so frightfully afraid of the young gentleman's taking to bad practices without giving anybody notice.

M. C.

MRS. MARSTON SEBRIGHT did not pretend to be asleep that night when Mr. Sebright entered her room. She was

unusually wide awake. She was dreading the consequences of Jack's appeal to his father, and she thought she might smooth the way a little.

So, after some general remarks about Jack not looking well, and being dull, she said—

"I fear Jack has a very common disease —I think he has fallen in love."

"In love!" exclaimed Mr. Sebright. "The young rascal! I daresay he'll quickly fall out again. And who is the object of his love?"

"I fear it is a young lady whose character will not bear investigation," said his wife.

"Indeed! What is her name?"

"Temple," she replied.

"Temple—Temple. What Temple is it?" he asked.

"Daughter of a Mr. Temple, who came

some months ago to live at Copse Hill."

"Temple!" he said again, as if in deep thought. "Oh, yes, of course I remember. Ah!" he continued, as if to himself, "clear-headed man that. Great loss in the political world. Made an unfortunate mess of his marriage, and retired into private life. His daughter, you say?" turning to his wife.

"Yes, and I fear from all accounts she is not at all what she should be."

"Never listen to accounts, my dear, but find out truth for yourself. I daresay Jack's quite able to choose for himself. But I suppose he's not serious about it, or I should know something of it."

"I hope not," said Mrs. Sebright. "I am afraid he has made some very undesirable acquaintances at Copse Hill. Mr. Voyd does not give a very good account of some of his parishioners there."

"Voyd? Oh, yes, that's the young man

who comes here sometimes. A very well-intentioned young man, but something of a fool. I'd rather see a boy like our Jack, wayward and diffident, unable to make up his mind, and with no confidence in himself; there's hope of such a boy in time. But these young puppies, who think they are going to reform the world, and begin by teaching their grandmothers and everybody else's grandmothers to suck eggs, do a great deal more harm than good. Better let the boy choose his own friends; he's not a bad judge, I should say. Instinct will help him. He's hardly arrived at the age of reason. If he makes a few mistakes, it will only give him experience; he'll soon find them out. If I chose his friends, I shouldn't choose that young parson."

This was very discouraging for Mrs. Sebright; her fears began to increase.

"I'm sorry to hear you say that," she

replied, "for I believe Mr. Voyd is a sincere friend of Jack's, and is truly anxious about him."

"What occasion is there for anxiety? The boy's chosen his career, and fulfilled my wishes. He's sure to go on all right now."

"But Mr. Voyd is exceedingly anxious about the people with whom he associates at Copse Hill. I can assure you, Marston, he has good cause to be anxious. Mr. Temple, for instance, may be a very clever man, but he is divorced from his wife, if there is nothing worse, and I have heard reports of something much worse, and that can hardly be called a desirable family to know."

"Mr. Temple has been very unfortunate, but I should imagine he was a man whom it is a privilege to know."

Mrs. Sebright began to think that every-

thing was against her, and she wished over and over again that she had told her husband everything from the first. She had an absolute belief in her husband's judgment, and she wondered why she had allowed Mr. Voyd to persuade her to keep anything from him.

Mr. Voyd had attacked her on her one weak point. She was passionately fond of her son, and she was always a little nervous of what he might do, because she saw his wild, wayward disposition. She had, as it were, kept him tied to her apron-string all these years, but she had used great tact to keep him so tied, and she dreaded the time when she should lose control over him, though she knew it must come. Unfortunately, when it came, there came also with it a *Deus ex machinâ*, in the form of the Rev. Vypar Voyd. Perhaps Jack Sebright would have considered him rather a *diabolus*

ex inferno. Not caring for gossip herself, she could not understand the temptation that gossip-loving people have to distort facts and tell lies, and she believed implicitly all that Mr. Voyd told her.

Now that she heard her husband's remarks on the subject, she began to think how unwise she had been.

Therefore when she went to sleep that night she was very much happier concerning Jack, but trembled to think what her husband would say when he found how foolish she had been.

CHAPTER V.

A STORMY EVENING.

The dull folk in an agricultural parish, if they see a lady walking with a gentleman, instantly whisper something wrong; the parson, if he is a young fool, brought into the world to disestablish the Church, picks up this faintly whispered gossip; after which that lady's life becomes a misery to her. As the wittiest Canon of St. Paul's remarked, the most dangerous animal to let loose among women is a wild curate.

M. C.

DR. SUTTON left Ashton Minima the next day, and the father, mother, and son sat down to dinner alone together for the first time. Marston Sebright looked happy, and proud of his boy.

"Now, my boy," he said, when the filberts and port were on the table, "here's success to you. I hope I may live to see you well on the way to becoming a bishop like your grandfather, and may you be as good a man."

"Thank you, father. I don't suppose I shall ever be a bishop, or as good a man as my grandfather, but I'll try—at least, for the latter."

"And when we've found a living for you, I suppose you'll be wanting a wife, eh, Jack?"

"I suppose I shall," said Jack, trying to laugh and look unconcerned; but both he and Mrs. Sebright were feeling uncomfortable.

"A snug vicarage and a nice little wife, eh? But from what I hear you seem to have chosen the wife before the vicarage. Is it so?"

Jack was confused. He was not prepared to find that his father already knew all about it, and he had been wondering how he should tell him. He looked at his mother, intending to be angry with her, but she put so much expression into the glance she returned him, as if she would implore him to make the best of it, that he softened, and replied to his father—

"It is true that I have met the lady whom I should like to marry, but I fear her father will never give his consent."

"Nonsense, Jack! Young lovers always fear difficulties in their way. Any lady might be proud of you, my boy. Who is it? Come, tell me all about it."

"It is Miss Temple, daughter of a gentleman who lives at Copse Hill. I met her at Mr. Frowde's."

"Daughter of William Temple. Very

good taste indeed, Jack, if the daughter is like the father. How old is she?"

"Nineteen, I think."

"Not old enough to know her own mind, but you can make up her mind for her if you choose. And have you proposed marriage to her?"

Jack hardly knew how to answer this question. He knew that, according to custom, he had no right to ask her to marry him without having previously asked her father's leave, and he thought his father would regard it in this light, and would blame him. At the same time he felt that he could not tell his father a lie, so he said,

"Yes, father; I know it is not the proper thing, but I have asked her, and I have not yet spoken to her father, because I was waiting till I had a home to offer her."

"Quite right, my boy. And does she accept you?"

"Yes," said Jack, but not at all in a cheerful tone.

"Well, then, I suppose there will be no difficulty with Mr. Temple. There is nothing objectionable in you, Jack—at least, that I can see. You are not positively ugly, you know," Mr. Sebright said, eyeing his son mischievously, "and I suppose we can manage to make such arrangements that a Mrs. Jack, and a limited number of little Jacks, can be provided for, can't we?"

"Thank you, father. But I fear there is an insuperable difficulty in this case."

"Nonsense, boy! Love gets over all difficulties, however insuperable. But tell me what is this 'insuperable difficulty'?"

"I fear some mischief has been made."

"Mischief! Mischief is only made by fools. Who has made mischief?"

Jack gave a glance at his mother. He almost hoped she would answer this ques-

tion; but she showed no signs of doing so. She looked very anxious.

"I think perhaps Mr. Voyd has unintentionally said——"

"Mr. Voyd! Oh! he can do no harm. A well-meaning young man; but weak, Jack, decidedly weak. Anything he says would scarcely carry much weight."

"But he has managed to make very serious mischief," said Jack.

"How? Tell me."

Jack again looked across at his mother. If he had been alone with his father, he could have told him in a very few words all about it, and he would not have spared his opinion of Mr. Voyd; but he saw his mother looking anxiously at him, as if she begged him to spare Mr. Voyd and herself.

"Well, Voyd seems to have come here —and—he said he heard——" Jack could not get on.

"If it is simply a question of what somebody heard and somebody else said, it is not worth going into."

"But there's that unfortunate letter," said Jack.

"What letter?"

"My dear," said Mrs. Sebright, seeing the difficulty had now come, "Mr Voyd, in his excess of anxiety for Jack, mentioned to me that he was not quite satisfied with the acquaintances that our boy was making at Copse Hill. He mentioned the Temples, particularly."

"What business is it of his," said Mr. Sebright severely.

"Well, you see the Temples are his parishioners, therefore he must know something about them, and he is much interested in Jack."

"Why this sudden interest in Jack on

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his part? Are you particularly attached to him, Jack?"

Jack's shrug of the shoulders was sufficient answer.

"Mr. Voyd, in his zeal for Jack, may somewhat have exaggerated the faults of the Temples; but I fear they are hardly desirable as family connections."

"Fiddlesticks!" said Mr. Sebright. "A man's character must not be judged by his misfortunes. But what about this letter Jack mentions?"

"Mr. Voyd informed me that Miss Temple's conduct with Jack and other gentlemen was much commented on. I said I thought it a pity her father did not know of it, and Mr. Voyd seems to have called on Mr. Temple to inform him of it. I suppose Mr. Voyd must rather have conveyed the impression that I had sent a

message to Mr. Temple, as that gentleman thought proper to write to me."

Jack looked very angry at this mention of Kate. He was crushing the empty nutshells with his hands into atoms.

"Mr. Temple wrote to you?" said Mr. Sebright slowly, and in a tone of astonishment. "Why have I not heard of this before? Where is the letter?"

Mrs. Sebright had to fetch it.

Mr. Sebright read it through.

"Dear me," he said, "what can it all mean? Did you send a message to Mr. Temple?"

"Not exactly," said Mrs. Sebright, wishing to shield Mr. Voyd as well as herself, "Mr. Voyd seems rather to have misunderstood me."

"Really, my dear, it is a pity you ever encouraged this meddlesome young man. This letter really places the matter in a very

awkward light. I agree with Jack that it is impossible to ask Mr. Temple after this; unless, indeed, the mischief can in any way be undone.

But Mrs. Sebright had in her heart a secret wish that the mischief should not be undone. She could not help thinking that there must be some foundation for what Mr. Voyd said, even if circumstances had been exaggerated, and she pictured Kate as a heartless young creature that had succeeded in infatuating her son. Moreover, with the British matron's notion of respectability, she could not get over the fact that Mr. Temple was divorced from his wife, and his sister separated from her husband. She was sorry for them, but would rather not have anything to do with them; and that her boy should marry into such a family was especially repugnant. So she said to her husband,

"I think, before you blame Mr. Voyd, you

should find out whether there is any truth in what he says. You must remember he is acting only for Jack's good; he cannot himself be interested in any way. He tells me he has actual proof of Miss Temple's misconduct, and I must say I think her father's letter tends to confirm this."

"That letter is simply the letter of a man who will not condescend to enter into details," said Mr. Sebright.

"I think you should see Mr. Voyd yourself, Marston, before deciding on anything. I know he possesses proof of Miss Temple's intimacy with a married man."

Jack looked unutterable things.

"I will not stand this, mother," said Jack, rising quickly.

"Don't be put out, my boy," said Mr. Sebright. "We'll make some inquiries before we go any further. I would rather not see Mr. Voyd, if I could help it, as I find him

excessively irritating; but for your sake, I will. I'll drive over to Copse Hill, and then I may, at the same time, perhaps, have the pleasure of making the personal acquaintance of Mr. Frowde.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SECRET OUT.

Good night, good rest. Ah! neither be my share:
She bade good night that kept my rest away.
SHAKESPEARE.

WHILE Jack is in the greatest distress, for fear of losing his little lady-love, and for fear that she may be tormented with all the rumours about her, she is in London, happily unconscious of trouble, and only wishing that her father would go back to Winterslow that she might see Jack. There is no talk of going back yet, and she begins to fear that Jack will go away again before she sees him. She writes and ex-

presses her fears to Mrs. Frowde, and Mrs. Frowde, knowing nothing of the letter that was Jack's stumbling-block, writes to tell Kate she may hear something of Jack from her father very soon, perhaps before her letter arrives.

Kate was in high glee when she had this news. She was longing to get rid of her secret, and she thought to herself that perhaps she would not have to keep it another day. And then she wondered what would happen. Would Jack come himself and ask her father, or would he write to him? She hardly knew how to get through the day, wondering every moment what would happen. But the night came, and her father bade her "good night" in the usual way, and Kate went to bed disappointed.

"Surely it will happen to-morrow," she thought. But as the morrow passed and nothing happened, Kate became nervous.

"Is it possible papa can have refused him?" she thought. "No, I am sure he wouldn't refuse my Jack; he hasn't a fault, and he's a great deal too good for me."

She fretted herself into such a nervous state that at last she went to Leonora's room for consolation. She jumped on the bed and said,

"Mamma, darling, I can't sleep a bit to-night."

"Why, what's the matter, child?" said Leonora. "I've noticed how excitable you've been the last two or three days. Hadn't you better take some medicine?"

"No, it isn't medicine I want," said Kate, and she put her hand in Leonora's.

"Then what is it, dear?"

"I don't know."

"I don't think you do," Leonora said laughingly.

What is it that makes one feel inclined

to be confidential at midnight? During the day it is easy enough to keep a secret, but at night one feels inclined to talk, especially on moonlight nights. On this night the moon was shining into Leonora's room, for she slept with her blinds drawn as she liked the light in the morning. The moonlight slanted across the bed just where Kate sat, casting a light on her blue dressing-gown, which she had thrown over her, and making it look an indescribable colour. She had tossed about so much on her pillow that her hair was in a tangled mess. As she sat there in the moonlight she looked a pretty little picture. And whether it was the moonlight, or what it was, it is impossible to say, but Kate found herself unable any longer to keep her secret.

"Mamma, darling."

"Yes."

"Do you think if anybody ever wanted

me to marry him, and he found out about —about—you know what I mean—would he have me?"

"I should think he would. It would depend on who the 'he' was. But why do you trouble your little head about such things?"

Leonora had often anxiously asked herself this question, and she hoped it would never occur to Kate. Now she wondered what had put it into the child's head.

"If it was some one who loved me very much, would he mind?"

"I think you had better not trouble yourself about it till that some one comes, Katie dear."

"He *has* come, mamma, darling," and then Katie put her head down on the bed and began to cry.

Kate was not a girl to cry for trifles, but she had kept her secret for what seemed

such a very long time to her, and the anxiety of the last two days had over-excited her brain, and caused her to think of all sorts of thing that might have happened to prevent Jack from marrying her.

Leonora said nothing for a few minutes—it came on her so suddenly; and then it flashed upon her why Kate had been so sympathising about Frank.

Kate seemed a mere child to her, scarcely capable of knowing her own mind, and she was inclined to treat the matter at first with not much seriousness, and to laugh at Kate about her first little love-affair. But she remembered that she was no older than Kate when Frank first loved her; and how much misery had she since suffered because she had not then encouraged him.

She soothed Kate as well as she could, and asked her to tell her all about it.

"You've not seen him, mamma, because

you never go out, but it's Jack Sebright, that goes to see Mr. Frowde. I love him so much, and I've so longed to tell you about him."

"And why didn't you, darling?""

"Because he said I must keep it secret till he has got a church, because he's going to be a clergyman, you know."

"My poor child! So you've been keeping your secret, have you? Well, I daresay it will all come right in the end. How long ago was it?"

"In the summer, before he went away to study. And Mrs. Frowde says he's come back now, just as we have come away. Oh! I want to see him so much!"

"So Mrs. Frowde tells you all about him, does she?"

"Yes; when she writes she sends a little bit of paper inside her letter, to tell me news of Jack, because she knows all about it, be-

cause Jack talks to her. You're not angry, mamma, darling, are you?"

"No, child; but it was silly of Mr. Sebright to wish any secrecy. Why didn't he ask your papa at once?"

"He was afraid to ask till he had got his church, because he said he had no position."

"That's how young people make mistakes," said Leonora, with a sigh; "and sometimes it becomes the mistake of a lifetime," she added.

"But, mamma," said Kate, "Mrs. Frowde, in her letter the other day, said that I should probably hear of Jack from papa; and I was so happy, because I thought it meant that Jack was going to ask papa. Do you think he has asked him?"

"I don't know, darling, but I'll speak to him to-morrow about it. Shall I?"

"Yes, please."

Kate, after some further consolation from

Leonora, went to bed—and dreamt of all sorts of difficulties between Jack and herself.

When Leonora spoke about the matter to her brother the next day he was astonished, and somewhat angry that the child had kept it secret from him.

"It is utterly impossible," he said. "I will not allow my child to be received into a family where such a slur has been cast on her character. I hoped to save both you and her from the knowledge of what has been said, and it was for that I left Winterslow so suddenly."

He then related to her all the details of his interview with Mr. Voyd.

Poor Leonora was completely cast down. She had hoped that at Winterslow at least there was peace and quietness for her.

"Don't worry about it, Leonora, it is the same everywhere. These backbiters and

slanderers manage to govern the world. We must humbly submit to them; they overpower us by numbers."

"But must poor little Kate suffer?" she said.

"It would be impossible for me to receive any overtures from Mr. Sebright, after the message I received from his mother."

"But the child will suffer."

"Oh! it's no doubt some passing fancy, and she'll forget it, if we keep her away from him. She's so young that it cannot be serious. She won't know her own mind for a few years more." And he thought of his own marriage to a girl who did not know her own mind.

"But, William, remember I was no older when I loved Frank; and look what has come of that."

Mr. Temple looked very serious.

"I do not see how I am to condescend to

listen to anything from a member of that family," said Temple.

"But, William, I entreat you, do not let pride stand in the way of love. The boy is not to blame."

"Well, we'll see about it," he said.

CHAPTER VII.

THE COUSINS.

My play is cat and mouse.
Mephistopheles.

WHEN Lord Arun left The Birches, he went with the Earl's party on a visit to a country house about twenty miles distant, where they were to stay a week. Harry Rivers remained with Frank Forncett. Lord Medway found his friend very serious during this week. Even chaff about "the widow" did not cheer him.

"Look here, old boy," said Lord Medway, "this won't do. You ain't a bit of fun now. I believe you really are seriously

in love, and with that pretty little Temple girl. A man in love is such a confounded bore. Hang it, Val, I can't stand it, you know."

"No, Charlie, I'm not in love; but you won't be bothered with me much longer, for I've some serious business to attend to in town when we leave here."

"By Jove! that *is* good! Old Val with serious business to attend to! That's something quite new. What shall we hear next? Can I help you? Not that I understand business a bit; but I'm willing to do my best."

"No, thanks, Charlie. I don't want any help. Don't you see, it's something that concerns some one else, and I don't want her name mentioned, don't you know?"

"Oh, there's a woman at the bottom of it, is there? You sly old boy, calling that serious business!"

"It *is* very serious, I assure you, Charlie. I'll tell you some day."

So Lord Arun went up to town to see if he could find Arundel Lifton. He called at his chambers in the Albany, and found that he was away, but was expected in a few days, and would not probably remain more than one night.

The servant, who knew that there had been a misunderstanding between his master and Lord Arun, and that they did not speak, seemed reluctant to say exactly which day he expected his master; but, on hearing that Lord Arun wanted to see him on very important business, he thought it might be some family matter, and told him the day.

He went there on the evening of the day mentioned, and found Lifton just arrived.

"Well, my boy," said Arundel Lifton, "come to look me up again? Can't do

without me? Got into a scrape? Or is it the widow again?"

"Arundel, I've come on serious business," said Valentine, looking serious, and trying to talk very seriously.

"Nonsense, Val; you've nothing to be serious about. You fancied you were in love some time ago, and you cut your best friend for trying to prevent you from making a fool of yourself. I suppose you've found it out now, and are grateful?"

Valentine could not help feeling that his cousin had perhaps, on that occasion, acted for his benefit; but he could not forgive him for his villainy. Indignation made him feel that he could speak out his mind to Lifton, but the cool, plausible manner of the man upset him. He began to talk in his usual roundabout way.

"Well, you see, a fellow may be grateful; but then, don't you know, it depends

on what the other fellow does it for—I mean, you know, what's his object."

"There, Val, now you're more like yourself. I begin to see what you mean. You want to know my object in preventing you from marrying that little woman."

"No, that isn't what I mean."

"Well, whatever you mean, let's have some dinner, Val, for I'm deucedly hungry."

"Thanks; I don't wish to dine. I have something to say;" and he looked very serious again, and spoke slowly.

"Oh! hang it, Val. I can't listen to anything till I've had something to eat. What you have to say may be serious to you, but the most serious thing in life to me just now is my dinner; so come along, and don't be a fool. I'll listen to what you say after dinner. One cannot judge a question impartially on an empty stomach."

Val followed his cousin, but he felt that

he was being too easily managed by him, and that he was not showing his indignation sufficiently.

A dainty dinner was daintily served, and the astute Lifton, thinking from Valentine's manner that there really was something rather unpleasant in store for him, made the boy eat and drink well, and kept him amused by pleasant chat, and no one better knew the art of being agreeable than Arundel Lifton.

By the time the dessert was on the table, Valentine was in a very different mood. He could not help thinking how jolly his cousin was, and wondered whether he was really so bad as he thought him. He was almost inclined to think that perhaps the women were in fault, and that Lifton, with a good wife, might have been a good man.

"But that splendid woman," he thought to himself—"surely she must have been a

good wife," and he looked thoughtfully into the fire.

"Well, Val, what's the serious business? I think the last thing we arrived at was that you were very glad I got you out of the clutches of the pseudo-widow, wasn't it? What next?"

"No, Arundel, look here, you know—who made her first get into trouble?"

"By Jove! how should I know? You'd better ask her. I'm not her keeper."

"I have no occasion to ask—I know well enough."

"Then what do you ask me for?"

"Well, Arundel, you've got some what's-his-name—I mean, you know, conscience—and you must know, you know, that it wasn't right."

"What isn't right—my conscience?"

"No. I mean, don't you see, the way you behaved to that poor girl."

"Good heavens! Val, one would want a dozen consciences, if one is to be troubled about every little minx one meets."

"But you ought to look after her."

"Look after her! Why, whatever could I do for her, except what I have done to keep her out of your way?"

"Something ought to be done for her, don't you see."

"No, I don't see. She has a regular allowance from her husband, and if she wants money, she knows I wouldn't refuse. What more can she want?"

"Her life is wrecked."

"Romantic nonsense! She has a very pleasant time of it. She has liberty to do what she likes, and go where she likes, and she is always taking in young fools like you."

"But, you know, she is not living like that now; she is shut up, don't you see, and has repented."

"Repented! Fiddlesticks! Those creatures never do repent. What a fool you are, Val!"

Val looked into the fire, and began to turn over in his mind slowly whether his cousin was right, and that he was a fool; but he could not help believing poor Flora.

"But I'm sure of it," he said, "because I've got her letter," feeling for it in his pocket, for he always carried it about with him. He took it out and looked at it.

"Show it to me," said Lifton.

Val was just going to pass it over, when his eye caught the sentence where she implored him not to tell Arundel Lifton what she had said.

"No," he said, "I can't show it, it's private, don't you see."

"Oh, private is it," replied Lifton, "the little animal has been saying something about me, I suppose. Telling you a romantic

and pitiful story, I suppose, of which she is the heroine, and I the villain."

"No," said Val, trying to shield her, "I heard all that when I went down with Charlie to his uncle's place."

"Oh, that's where you heard it, is it? And where was that?"

"At Copse Hill."

"Copse Hill?"

"Yes."

"Did you stay there long?"

"About four days."

"Did you meet anyone there?"

"Yes."

"Whom?"

"Her daughter."

"Oh, that accounts for this sentimental mood, does it, Val? I suppose you heard all the history?"

"I did, Arundel."

"And I hope you see what a deuced lucky

thing it was that I saved you from marrying the woman. You see she's got a daughter nearly your own age. With a clever arrangement of paint and hair-dye she manages to make you young fellows believe she's only a girl. Ugh! it's horrid to think of kissing all that chemical stuff. How can you do it, Val?"

Val felt a little ashamed for a moment at having so thoroughly believed in Flora's youth, but then she had acknowledged to him that her object in life had been to attract, so he still believed in her repentance.

"But, Arundel, don't you see she's sorry for it now, and you being the first, you know, to ruin her, ought to take care of her."

"Hang it, boy, there's nothing I can do. I can't have that little painted animal tied to my tail. What can I do?"

"Do you know where she is?"

"No, but it's easily found out, through

the bankers; Temple's bankers supply her with money, and she is obliged to communicate with them."

"Let us find out and see what we can do, don't you see?"

"I'll find out, but I'm not going after her, and if you go, she'll be getting hold of you again and making a fool of you."

"But look here, you see, you ought to join me, because it's only right."

"Nonsense, boy! I'll join you for your own sake."

Arundel Lifton felt irritated. He hoped this matter was long since hushed up, and that it would never be mentioned again. It was only spoken of in whispers amongst the elders of his family, and here was this young cousin with the whole story at his fingers' ends.

"Val," he said presently, "I suppose you met Temple at Copse Hill."

"Yes."

"Did he know you were related to me?"

"I don't know at all."

"When did you hear all this, then?"

"Oh, Charlie told me, don't you see, when we went up for the night."

"Then my name was not mentioned?"

"No—at least, I heard somebody talking about you."

"Who was it?"

"Oh! either Lord Ravensbourne or his brother."

"What did they say?"

"They called you a scoundrel."

"I'm sure I'm much obliged to Lord Ravensbourne, or his brother, whichever it was."

"Did you see any other member of the Temple family?"

"Yes, Arundel, I did."

"Who was it?"

"Your wife."

For once Arundel Lifton's face showed some feeling. He had been dreading to ask Valentine this question, and yet he was anxious to do so. Knowing how little she went out, he thought it just possible that she might not have shown herself.

He sat looking at the fire for a long time without speaking.

"Arundel, how could you leave such a glorious woman," said Val presently.

"None of your romantic nonsense," said Lifton.

Valentine would have thought this a hard-hearted remark, and would probably have pursued the subject; but the tone in which it was said effectually stopped him. It was a very unusual tone for his cousin.

There was silence for some time.

"Well, Val," said Lifton, "I suppose you

don't want to go off on this wild goose chase in a hurry. It will do in a week or two, I suppose?"

"I should like to do it as soon as possible, don't you see, because I'm uneasy about it."

"What a boy you are, Val! By the time you're as old as I am you'll take life more easily. Well, I'll communicate with the bankers, and drop you a line to let you know, and we'll see what can be done. But I think you'll find she'd rather be left to go her own way."

After Valentine had left, Arundel Lifton sat there thinking till far into the night.

He had taken the world easily, never allowing anything to interfere between him and his pleasure. He gave one the idea of having no cares or sorrows. He was lucky in everything he undertook. He

had no intimate friend, for he trusted no one sufficiently. He never made a friend of a servant, or treated a servant with much confidence. He seemed to stand alone in the world, and to be quite satisfied with himself.

And yet there were times when he was intensely miserable, and he seemed to have no power of driving his misery away. It would take complete possession of him. On these occasions he would sit for hours, doing nothing.

Whether he was troubled with that conscience of which Val made mention, or whether it was some physical defect it is impossible to say. A physician might have put it down to the liver, whereas another person might say it was his conscience. But he never confided to anyone what his feelings were at these times.

On this night he seemed worse than usual. The fire slowly died out, the cinders making an unpleasant creaky noise as they fell. All was so still that the ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece seemed to fill the room with sound.

The last red spark in the fire was gone, but he still sat there motionless.

At last he became conscious of the cold. He got up, and went to the sideboard and poured out some brandy, and took it, and then walked restlessly up and down the room.

"Why need that young puppy remark that she was a glorious creature?" he said to himself. "What business is it of his? Glorious creature, indeed! As if he were a judge! Why, she's absolutely perfect. She's divine. And I?" he stopped in front of the mirror and looked at himself, "why, I'm a fiend, and I look it. But what might

I have been if I had listened to her? Well, I deserve it."

He then finished the brandy he had poured out and went to bed.

CHAPTER VIII.

FLORA REPENTANT.

Change slander to remorse—that is some good.
Much Ado about Nothing.

There came a big spider
And sat down beside her
And frightened Miss Muffet away.
Nursery Rhyme.

FLORA'S repentance was not, as Arundel Lifton supposed, temporary or imaginary. When she left Rowell St. Dunstan she went to London, thinking she could remain unnoticed there till she could decide what was to be done.

Whenever she was in town she was ac-

customed to go to a well-known church, celebrated for its ritualistic service and its fashionable audience—or rather congregation. She liked the music and flowers and incense and fashionable dresses, and she used to say her prayers from a dainty little prayer-book bound in ebony and silver, and try to persuade herself she was very much in earnest.

There was altogether a pleasurable sensation to her in this little bit of playing at religion. She would walk up the aisle in a graceful way, with many yards of rich silk and Estelle behind her. Then she would rustle prettily into her place, and take some time to arrange her silks round her.

There was nothing stern in religion to her. She would say the prayers through mechanically, being accustomed to the words and not attaching any meaning to them. And if the preacher hinted in his sermon of

anything unpleasant hereafter for those who do not the right thing in this world, it was quite lost upon her, for she was considering how she appeared, and who was looking at her.

So she made her religion one of the pretty little amusements of her life.

On the first Sunday after she left Rowell St. Dunstan she went to her favourite church. She was really sincere in her repentance, but was weak-minded, and she began to wish she had some one to whom she could tell all her troubles and the history of her life. She was unusually weak at this time, for the quiet life at Rowell St. Dunstan had not agreed with her. She had no resources in herself, and she missed the constant change and excitement. She certainly deserved praise, for she found the process of repentance very hard work indeed, and she often felt tempted to resume her old life.

She had lost health and spirits, and on the morning she walked into church it was not with the air she had been accustomed to. It was at a time when people were out of town, so the congregation was not a fashionable one. This in former days would have depressed Flora, and considerably interfered with her devotions; but now it was in accordance with her feelings, for the world had become a very dull place to her.

Poor Flora had not been able to sacrifice herself so far as to give up all artificial adornment; she had tried it, but the result seemed to her so dreadful, and Estelle's remarks on the subject were not encouraging.

So, although she looked very subdued on that Sunday morning, and showed signs of being out of health, she still had the pink and white face and yellow hair. Loss of health and spirits had entirely taken away the brightness of the eyes, and no amount

of pencilling would make it up. There was also a deep mark under the eyes which paint would not fill.

She kept her eyes down, and said her prayers more gravely than usual, and tried to imagine that she felt all she was saying; but she could not feel it. She had not brain enough. She wanted some one to take her in hand, and point out to her how wicked she had been, and what she ought to do. She tried to listen to the sermon, but it did not keep her attention. As she walked out of church she went down the side aisle—always avoiding notice now, instead of courting it—and as she stood waiting for the crush in front, she saw a little placard by the side of a red-baize door. On this placard people were invited to confession, or rather they were informed that confession would be heard after church.

In a moment the thought struck her that she longed to confess.

"Estelle," she said, in a hurried whisper, "go home. I will come soon."

She nervously pulled open the baize door and disappeared.

She found herself in a small bare room, furnished simply with a table and a few chairs. Presently another person came in and sat down; a woman poorly dressed, looking very ill and thin.

They looked shyly at one another, but did not speak. They waited for some minutes, when, to Flora's great relief, the clergyman who had taken chief part in the service appeared. He beckoned to the pale thin woman to follow him, and Flora found herself alone.

She sat there for what seemed to her a very long time, for she was getting nervous,

and did not like the ugly room, but in reality she had only waited a few minutes, when the same clergyman appeared again. He seated her on one side of the table, and himself took a seat on the other side. He was a man of perhaps thirty, or a little over, but he had enough knowledge of the world and of womankind (in the confessional) to see what sort of woman he had before him. He noticed the painted face, and dyed hair, and splendid clothes, and pretty little manner of Flora. He found no difficulty in dealing with her at first. He had had previous experience of such a pretty sinner.

He gradually and gently drew Flora's story from her. She did not mention any names, and he did not ask for them. When he had heard all he began to question her, to find out whether her repentance was really sincere; but poor Flora broke down under the questioning, and began to cry.

"Do not distress yourself," he said. "I am only anxious to guide and counsel you. Tell me what you would like to do."

"I want to get right away out of this cruel world," she said; and she put her head down on the table, and sobbed loudly.

"Hush! hush!" said the clergyman, who was curate of the church. He began to feel uncomfortable with such an hysterical woman on his hands. Flora was utterly unable to control herself, and the parson looked round helplessly to see what he could do. He began to think it would be necessary to keep smelling-salts, or sal volatile, or some such remedies in the confessional.

The artificial arrangements on Flora's face were being rapidly washed away by her tears, and the curate was getting alarmed at being shut up in a room with a woman in such a state. He thought of calling in help,

and then it occurred to him that it would seem very odd for him to be found with a woman in hysterics.

"I beseech you to be calm," he said; but Flora showed no sign of listening to his entreaty, and sobbed louder than ever.

At last the hysterical fit abated, and the curate, frightened of a recurrence, endeavoured to bring the interview to a speedy close.

"The rector is away," he said, "and I feel that your case ought to be laid before him. He will come back on Thursday, and I will see him at once, and if you will come here on Friday morning at twelve, he will see you. He will, I am sure, agree with me that the only way in which you can atone for your past life is by joining our sisterhood. You will then be out of the way of further temptation, and will get out of the world of which you have grown

tired. Don't you think it will be best for you?"

"Is it a nunnery?" said Flora, in a crying tone.

"No, it is not a nunnery, but a home where you can devote yourself to the service of Christ, and find peace from the troubles of the world. But Mr. Johnson will tell you more about it. Will you come on Friday to this room?"

"Yes," said Flora, beginning to cry again.

The curate, not wanting to witness another hysterical fit, hurried her out to the church door, and speedily found a cab for her.

Estelle wondered what had become of her mistress. After watching anxiously for her for some time, she put on her bonnet, intending to walk to the church and inquire about her; but just as she was leaving the house, Flora drove up in the cab.

Estelle did not at all like the dull life she had been leading lately, but she really was attached to her mistress, and felt it her duty to stay with her, whatever freaks she might practise. She was glad to be in town again, though it was the dull season, and she hoped it meant the beginning of a gayer life.

She had noticed how her mistress was losing health, and had often remonstrated with her for not moving about more, but she had found out some time ago that all remonstrance was vain. But when she saw Flora's appearance as she got out of the cab, she broke out into loud lamentations.

"Ah! madame, then where have you been? What is the matter? Is it that *diable* man?"

Estelle always connected everything unpleasant with Arundel Lifton. She took her mistress to the sofa, and went running on—

"Ah, *mon Dieu!* it must be. The *bêtise* —the wretch! he loves madame, he will not let anyone else love her. Madame, lie still —I will fetch something."

Estelle succeeded in reviving her mistress, and then took her upstairs to repair the damages which tears had made in her face.

Flora felt that her next task was to tell Estelle of their separation. She was in such an excitable mood that she wanted to tell everything at once. As Estelle made up her face and arranged her hair, she said,

"Why trouble about it, Estelle? I do not need it any more. I am going away from you, Estelle, and I shall be shut up in a nunnery, and wear ugly coarse black clothes, and never see anybody, and say prayers all day."

Flora's ideas on the subject had only been gathered from books.

"Ah! madame, then you must not go and shut yourself up; it will kill you; you will die. And poor Estelle—what can she do without you?"

"I daresay you will find some one better than me, Estelle."

"Ah, never, madame—never!"

"You must go for a holiday with your friends, Estelle. I will give you some money, and you shall have all my clothes. I shall never want them again."

Estelle's face rather brightened at the idea of having all her mistress's beautiful clothes to show in her native village, but she was really sorry at the idea of losing her.

"Madame is generous—too generous; but I want no holiday; I want to be with madame always."

"'Tis impossible," said Flora. "I must get away out of this cruel world. There is

no happiness for me here!" and she began to cry.

Estelle tried to comfort her, but she was in an hysterical state. The continual repression she had practised for the last few months had made her weaker than ever, and now that she had unburdened her mind she broke down entirely.

For three days she did not leave her room, and Estelle nursed her carefully. But she had not altogether lost that elasticity of body and mind which had enabled her for so many years to keep her youthful appearance, and on Friday morning she was ready to keep her appointment with the curate to meet the rector.

It was a fine, bright September morning, and when she started out she felt so much better than she had done for a long time, and so full of spirits, that she half repented her resolution. She tripped along in dainty

fashion, almost in her old way. She had to cross Regent Street, and, finding she was early, thought she would prolong her walk by just going to look at the shops. Although she was dressed more quietly than usual, she looked different from the people who usually frequent Regent Street in the early morning in September; therefore she attracted attention. She soon found she was being closely followed by a man; then the horror of her past life came back on her, and she hurried to the church.

There was no one in it, and as she walked up the aisle her little steps sounded through the place. She rushed quickly to the red baize door, glad to get out of the oppressive stillness of the church. She found no one in the little room, and she sat down nervously, and began to look round her. She was such a creature of impulse that she was

depressed as easily as she was excited; and the dulness and loneliness of the church, and the bare look of the little room, had quite made her forget the exhilaration she had felt from the bright September sunshine half an hour ago.

She sat there what seemed to her an hour, but what was really only a few minutes. She began to wish she might run out again, but was almost frightened to do so. If she could only have got out of that room straight into the open air, she might have done it. But she dreaded walking right through that lonely church again, hearing her own footsteps.

She saw a curtain on one side of the room behind which, it seemed to her, there must be an exit somewhere, but she had become so thoroughly nervous that she was afraid to lift it aside. What should she do? She could not bear this much longer, she thought.

How she wished she had brought Estelle with her. The room was not well lighted. The window was a narrow slit, with diamond panes, and was very dusty. Just then the sun went under a cloud, which gave even a more ghostly look to the place. She got up impatiently, ready to cry, when she saw a very big spider walking across the floor to her. She had a great horror of spiders, and most creeping animals, and the room was so small that she did not see well how to get out of its way. She took up her skirts, and tried to dodge the spider, but the poor fellow, fancying she was making darts at him, got embarrassed, and ran in all directions. It suddenly occurred to her to jump on the chair, which she did; and while in this undignified position, with the look of the greatest alarm on her face, she saw the curtain pushed aside, and the curate enter. He appeared somewhat astonished to see

her in this position, and inquired what was the matter.

"I have been very much alarmed," said Flora. "Look at that monster," pointing to the unfortunate spider.

"Pray don't alarm yourself," said the curate, sweeping the spider into a corner with his handkerchief, and helping Flora down from the chair. "Pray sit down and calm yourself. Mr. Johnson will be here presently."

Flora sat down uneasily, looking round nervously to see where the spider had gone.

Now if she had walked straight from the September sunlight into some pleasant room to meet Mr. Johnson, it is doubtful whether she would not have been reluctant to give up her liberty, and money, and everything else, to join the sisterhood of this church; but the big empty church, and little bare room, and large ugly spider, had so worked

upon her imagination that she was ready to do anything and everything she was told.

The curate left her for a few moments, and then returned, asking her to follow him. She passed behind the curtain, and through a dark passage, till she came to a larger and somewhat better-looking room, which was the vestry. There she found a comfortable-looking middle-aged man. The curate had evidently prepared him to receive a very nervous lady, for he was excessively kind and tender in his manner. He did not trouble her to tell her story, but repeated it to her as he had heard it from the curate, and asked her if it was all true. She said it was.

"And now," he said, "you propose to atone for the grievous sins you have committed by devoting yourself and all you have to the service of God."

At the mention of her grievous sins she

looked a little nervous, and showed signs of crying. The rector, having heard of the scene on Sunday, did not want a repetition of it, so thought proper to make no more allusions to her sins. He questioned her very closely as to whether she really wished to renounce the world altogether. She, being in the most abject state, was glad to say yes to anything. The rector comforted her as well as he could, and promised to make arrangements for her removal to the branch sisterhood in Surrey in a week's time.

The curate put her in a cab and sent her to her lodgings, promising to call on her frequently before her departure.

She occupied the week in making her arrangements. Her dresses and many of her clothes were given to Estelle. Her jewelry she would take with her; for, as the curate pointed out, if she wished to leave

the sisterhood before she finished her novitiate she would be glad of her jewels, and if she did not they would be the means, through their value, of doing a great deal of good.

On the day appointed, one of the sisters came to take Flora down to the home in Surrey.

Mr. Johnson had commissioned a particularly kind-hearted woman to do this, as he knew how excitable Flora was. But on this occasion she was in an apathetic mood, and nothing would rouse her. When they arrived at the gates, they turned in through some small but pretty grounds. The long shadows of September lay across the grass, the gossamer floated in the air, and a robin was loudly singing his evening hymn, perched in a tree over the gate.

"Is it not lovely?" said Sister Agnes, who had been all the summer working hard

in London, going into squalid houses, and nursing sick people. But Flora, who liked the gaslight glare of a ball-room better than the September sunlight, and the music of a waltz better than a robin's song, did not wake up from her apathy to reply.

She was very kindly received by the mother and sisters. Sister Agnes related to the mother what she had heard from Mr. Johnson. The mother thought it would be well to keep Flora's mind engaged, and tried to find employment for her; but she divided her time between hysterics and apathy, and at last it was deemed prudent to have medical advice for her. Every care was taken of her. Her income was a welcome addition to the funds of the home, and the sisters were, for the most part, kind women, and pitied her, though perhaps some of them were inclined to consider that what she suffered was only a just retribution for

her many sins, for her story soon got whispered amongst them.

The calm subdued manner of the sisters irritated rather than soothed her. She longed for some quick excitable person like herself, and often called out for Estelle. The mother, fancying that it was better for her to be kept quiet, appointed the quietest of the sisters to attend on her.

There is a great diversity of character generally to be seen in a sisterhood, especially a Protestant sisterhood. With Catholics the fancy for a secluded life often begins early, or a mother who has several daughters thinks one should be a nun, so the life is adopted professionally, as it were, and not with respect to any particular disposition. But amongst Protestants in England the sisters are generally women who cannot get on at home, or have been disappointed in love, or have seen all the pleasures of life and got tired of them.

Women who cannot get on in their own families, who are always discontented and out of temper, and make everyone around them uncomfortable, often do well in a sisterhood. The energy which is spent on bad temper is turned into a useful channel.

The sister who waited on Flora had, years ago, irritated her parents, and brothers and sisters, and the servants of the household by her continual bad temper and disagreeable ways, and now she equally irritated Flora by her calm serenity and gentle manner.

Whether the treatment of Flora in the home was right or not, she showed no signs of amendment; so, by the time the chivalrous Lord Arun had made a resolution to better her condition, it seemed probable that she was past bettering in this world, at least.

CHAPTER IX.

MORE GOSSIP.

XANTHIAS:
Yes, but the fun of gossiping!

ÆACUS:
By Jove, I don't know anything more exquisite.

XANTHIAS:
By Jove, the god of families. And, when you hear through keyholes, eh! the master's secrets?

ÆACUS:
Glorious!
Of course you go and tell your friends?

XANTHIAS:
Of course I do.
By Jove, 'tis then I know the height of happiness.

ÆACUS:
Phœbus Apollo! give me your right hand, my pal:
Let us embrace, for we are cronies suitable.

ARISTOPHANES.—*The Frogs.*

IT is a bright, frosty morning at Copse Hill. Everybody is moving quickly, to

keep warm. The school-children are running home to dinner, blowing their fingers as they go. Even old Biggins is carrying his four and twenty stone of flesh about more briskly than usual. He is helping the men to unpack one of his waggons which has come in from London, and he is anxious to get off to the market at a neighbouring town, so he is hurrying the man with his usual monotonous, strong language. Miss Tattleton is busy, for it is Saturday morning. There is extra baking to do, and various goods for Saturday night customers have to arrive by carrier, and be unpacked. Moreover, Miss Tattleton has to be in the bakehouse herself this morning, for John made such a number of visits to the Pleiades on the previous day that he is unable to attend to his work properly. He has again had notice to leave, but he has that, on an average, once a fortnight, so he takes no notice

of it. Miss Tattleton, after exhausting all the epithets she usually applies to him on these occasions, has set him to clean the yard, and he is only waiting for an opportunity, when he thinks she will not be watching, to go over to the Pleiades and get a glass of beer. He thinks, if he could just get one glass to pull him together, he could do his work. He sees Mrs. Voyd go by and enter Miss Tattleton's gate, and then he thinks he will soon be safe, for Miss Tattleton is sure to have a gossip with her, although it is Saturday.

Miss Tattleton has just finished in the bakehouse, and takes off her baking-apron and shakes the flour from her dress, and goes in to see Mrs. Voyd, and commences at once a lament over John's bad ways.

"Why not make him take the pledge?" said Mrs. Voyd, "we can do no real good

with the lower classes till we make them all teetotallers."

"Oh! he's taken it several times," replied Miss Tattleton, "but it's no good. And, poor soul, he can't do without a little beer. He's not a large eater, and when he's all right he really is a good worker."

Miss Tattleton, with all her faults, had a very large vein of kindness running through her. That tenderness, or pity for others, or soft-heartedness, or whatever it is, belongs so especially to the human race that we speak of it as *humanity*. We sometimes say of a person that he is so human, or that he has so much human kindness in him, or that he is full of humanity. All this points to the fact that this particular quality is an attribute of the human race. A spot can generally be found in the hardest heart where humanity dwells, and how often do

we overlook the faults of a person because of his humanity.

Miss Tattleton had many faults; she could be a good friend and a bad enemy. There is nothing shows true nobility of character more than to behave gracefully to your enemy. But Miss Tattleton could not behave gracefully to an enemy—not by any means. However, she had humanity, and this humanity was a thing that Mrs. Voyd did not understand. The Rev. Vypar Voyd and his wife are well matched in that, they go through life doing their duty stolidly, doggedly, and mechanically, but they have no humanity. They do not understand what it is.

Therefore Mrs. Voyd did not understand Miss Tattleton's pity for her drunken servant. Mrs. Voyd's excuse for coming round to Miss Tattleton's was that she wanted some trifle in a hurry, as she was going away on

a visit to her mother at Battlefield till Monday. This was a convenient opportunity of getting the latest news to take to her seven sisters. When she had made her purchase she followed Miss Tattleton into her snug little back parlour, and was placed in the big easy-chair ready for a gossip.

"The Temples are still away," said Miss Tattleton.

"And I don't think they'll come back in a hurry," said Mrs. Voyd. "I think Mr. Voyd has settled them."

"And no loss either," said Miss Tattleton. "They never bought anything in the village."

"I consider it is a fortunate thing they have gone, and I only hope they may never come back," exclaimed Mrs. Voyd, in a tone of virtuous indignation. "With such an example," she continued, "as they set we can never hope to do anything with the

lower classes. If we could only get rid of the Frowdes and Mr. Forncett, and get some good earnest people who would help in parish work, we might make a reform in the parish. But at present we have so many hindrances."

"Yes," said Miss Tattleton. "Mr. Forncett isn't much good, though he is the son of a lord, they say. When the Wemys's had the place they bought seven pounds of butter from me every week, and never grumbled at the price; and a lot of other things besides; and the servants used to run in here whenever they liked, and bought all they wanted here."

This may have had something to do with the fact that Mrs. Wemys never could keep her servants for any length of time.

As to the Frowdes, Miss Tattleton did not secretly in her heart wish them to go. It was Manly Frowde who had petitioned the

Government for a post-office in the village, and suggested her as the post-mistress; and his large postal business kept the office up 'Tis true she derived very little actual profit as post-mistress, but the position gave her importance, and brought many more people to her shop. Those who were fond of gossip could now find an excuse in a shilling's-worth of stamps. For every impression of Her Majesty's head that went out of that shop a proportionate amount of gossip also went. Then there were many people who came to the shop simply to hear the last news of the "author over the way," and Miss Tattleton liked the importance of being the person who supplied that news. But Miss Tattleton knew Mrs. Voyd's opinion concerning the Frowdes, so she quite agreed with her that the sooner they could be got rid of the better.

"There they go," said Miss Tattleton.

Manly Frowde and his wife were at this moment passing the window. Mrs. Voyd looked out, keeping herself back sufficiently not to be seen.

"There she is, looking up in his face," said Miss Tattleton. "I believe she worships that man, and would tell a lie, or do anything for him. How ridiculous they are, always going about together like that!"

"Mr. Voyd says *she* is the worst of the two. She doesn't hesitate to interfere in parish affairs. And what a bad man *he* must be to be carrying on with Miss Temple in that way! And that Mr. Forncett, too! I am sure Mr. Voyd has done real good in getting his poor friend Mr. Sebright out of her clutches. Mrs. Sebright is most grateful."

"Why don't you introduce Mr. Sebright to your sisters?" said Miss Tattleton, looking mischievous. "He would never look at

that ugly Temple girl if he once saw them."

If Miss Tattleton had been mentioning Mrs. Voyd's sisters to anyone else, she would have said, "those awkward Urgent gals;" but of course she suited herself to her company.

"Mr. Voyd will no doubt invite him in time, when he comes to his senses, and has given up the acquaintance of such people as the Frowdes," said Mrs. Voyd. "I see Mr. Forncett has a visitor," she continued, peeping through the window which overlooked the garden of The Birches.

"Yes," replied Miss Tattleton; "he came in here yesterday."

"Did he?" said Mrs. Voyd, in an inquiring tone, evidently wishing to hear about it.

"He came to order some things to be sent up to old Leonard Day, who is ill."

"Yes, somebody came to tell Mr. Voyd Leonard was ill; but as Mr. Voyd says it

will not do to help anyone who does not come to church. I hear that old Leonard has not been to church for years, so he cannot expect help. And what did the gentleman say?"

"Oh, I chaffed him about being married; for he came here when Mr. Forncett first looked at the place, and said he should so much like to live here himself. I asked him whether he still wanted to come, and whether he'd found a wife. He said if he wanted a wife he should like the little lady over the way, meaning that Temple girl. All the gentlemen seem in love with the little chit."

"The little hussy!" said Mrs. Voyd indignantly.

"I told him he was just too late, for she'd gone away, and nobody knew whether she was coming back, and that, according to all accounts, it was a good miss for him. 'What

do you mean?' says he. 'Why,' says I, 'there's half-a-dozen others tacked on to her tail, and her father's had to get her away in a hurry, for fear of the consequences,' and I gave him a knowing wink."

"What did he say?" said Mrs. Voyd eagerly—she was becoming interested.

"Why, he looked puzzled, and said he was going to see her in London, and then he said 'good morning' rather sharply, and went out. And I thought, 'That's one for you, young man.'"

"Well, I never!" said Mrs. Voyd. "You'd think a girl of her age never would dare to go on so. How grateful Mr. Sebright ought to be to Mr. Voyd!"

While these two women are settling everybody's affairs for them, John has meandered down his usual path through the furze on the hill to the Pleiades.

"Well, John," said Biggins, "how's 'Lizer to-day?"

Until the vicar made such a bond of union between the innkeeper and the shop-woman, Biggins had been accustomed to mention Eliza Tattleton by a term which, if applied to a female dog, is perfectly correct, but, when applied to a woman, is considered particularly opprobrious, and is not to be placed on paper.

John answered with a grunt. He had not had his glass of beer yet, and did not feel inclined to speak to anyone.

"Come along, old man," said Biggins. "I see what's the matter with you," and he handed him some beer.

John drank it off eagerly, and then sat down.

"Let's have another, guv'nor," he said. "I'm beginning to feel a bit better now. *She's* such a fool," he continued, pointing

his finger in the direction of Miss Tattleton's (he always designated his mistress by a pronoun). "She's been at it with her jaw this morning, and turned me out of the bakehouse, all because I felt a bit dizzy, and couldn't eat no breakfast; and if I'd had a glass of this 'ere, I should have been all right."

"I suppose you've had the sack again," said old Biggins, with a laugh.

"Had the sack!—yes, and what's the good? She ain't a-going to get rid of me, when I was there afore her; she needn't think she is. She's got one of them gossiping there that's sure to be a long time, so I'll enjoy this glass, guv'nor."

John, who had an hour before been abjectly cowering before his mistress, was now taking courage.

"She ain't a bad sort, you know," John went on, "when you knows how to manage

her. But, lor' bless you! the women all wants managing—don't they now, guv'nor?"

"That's about it, old man," said Biggins oracularly, who had made rather a mess of it with womenkind himself. "Keep 'em in order, says I, that's the thing."

"Yes," said John, "and what right have she to the key of the beer?" John was thinking of his grievances. Miss Tattleton had a habit of keeping the key most strictly when John had one of his drinking fits on; but rumour, which is ever unkind, hinted that Miss Tattleton wanted the key for her own use.

"Ah!" said Biggins, with a wink at John, "perhaps she wants it for herself."

Now John, although he liked to pour out his troubles concerning his mistress, did not like to hear her attacked. He had a certain admiration for her, and, however much he might blame her himself, he would not

allow anyone else to do so; moreover, John was a chivalrous man, and would be inclined to take any woman's part. He had reached a very comfortable stage over his two glasses of beer—or rather mugs—for the beer at the Pleiades was served in large white mugs with blue and brown stripes painted round the rims and base; but he was quite alive to the fact that his mistress was being attacked.

"Lor' bless you—no, she don't want it; only don't you see, when she takes it, I ain't a-going to ask for it. I waits till she forgets all about it, and puts it in the old tea-pot on the sideboard, or in the jar on the mantel-piece. I knows all the places where she puts it, and if it ain't in one, I know it's in another."

"She's got it now, John," said Biggins.

"Ah! but don't you see, the barrel's

empty, and we're expecting a new one by the carrier."

A customer came in, and seeing John, and knowing him to be what was called Miss Tattleton's factotum, asked him what was the latest news.

Now John, although he lived with the greatest gossip in the parish, did not understand the art and science of gossip. What he might have been with education and without drink it is impossible to say, but in his present state he showed a simplicity which some people might admire, and others ridicule. This was a specimen of his idea of latest news; he always spoke of what was last on his mind.

"Well, things are pretty middling. You see, I was waiting for a frost to get up a stick or two of celery, and I got it up the day afore yesterday, but it was regular worked under by worms, and not a bit

worth eating could you get out of it. The grubs and worms in that bit of a garden you wouldn't believe."

It did not occur to John that the grubs and worms were likely to increase while he was continually popping at the birds with a miserable old gun he had; not that he was ever known to shoot a bird, but he effectually frightened them off.

The customer, not finding John's information worth much, dropped the subject.

The carrier came up at this moment; John was interested in the barrel of beer. Moreover, he thought if his mistress had finished her gossip and wondered where he was, he could make the excuse that he had been looking out for the carrier. So he went out to see if the barrel had arrived safely. The carrier and his horse were both odd characters. They travelled on three days in the week between Medenhithe

and Righting, a distance of thirteen miles, and stopped at every public house on the way, and there were a good many. They started in the morning at eight, and seldom reached home till after midnight. They would probably sometimes have not reached home the same night, but that the old horse knew every inch of the way, and did not, like his master, refresh himself at every public house.

"Late again," said Biggins.

"Not very," said the carrier. "I had a heavy load."

"You always have," said Biggins, with an oath. "What have you got for them?" continued Biggins, pointing over his shoulder to Manly Frowde's place.

"Meat hamper and two cases of wine," said the carrier gruffly.

This was the sort of conversation that usually went on between the carrier and

Biggins: not that Biggins much cared to know what came for the Frowdes, but he had found out what sort of information to supply to the vicar.

The carrier went round to Miss Tattleton's gate, and old John made a great show of getting out the beer barrel, and other packages, fearing lest his mistress had finished her gossip and was watching him. But he need have been in no fear, as the buzz of gossip and the venom of slander were still filling the little back parlour.

The carrier was a dreamy man with an apathetic temperament, and unless you went out to the cart and positively demanded the parcels you expected he carried them about with him for an indefinite period.

Now old John was more interested in the barrel of beer than anything else, and having got out that and one other parcel

he was satisfied, and the carrier went on. Miss Tattleton, when she was not engaged in gossip, generally came out to look after her parcels; but being this morning particularly engaged in this way she neglected her business. So the parcel she most wanted was carried on.

If this sort of thing happened often it would no doubt help to account for the fact that Miss Tattleton's business was not a lucrative one. Mrs. Voyd is still in Miss Tattleton's parlour when Marston Sebright drives by in his dog-cart, with Jack by his side.

"Oh! there's poor Mr. Sebright," said Mrs. Voyd, "with another gentleman. Perhaps it is his father. I wonder whether they have been calling on Vypar."

Mrs. Voyd went out at the shop door, and by running across the green just met

the dog-cart as it pulled up at Manly Frowde's gate.

Jack lifted his hat to her. She put up her hand to shake hands with him.

"Have you seen Vypar?" she said.

"No; he was not at home."

Jack introduced her to his father.

"Oh! I'm so sorry Vypar was not at home; but he is sure to be presently, for we are to start in half an hour for my father's, where we stay till Monday."

"I called to see Mr. Voyd on some very important business," said Marston Sebright, rather severely, "and as it may take some little time I will not detain him now, but call another day."

"I'm sure he could spare half an hour," said Mrs. Voyd, anxious to know what the business was.

"I could not think of detaining him," said Marston Sebright.

"We shall be back on Monday," said Mrs. Voyd.

"I will take my chance of finding him next week," he replied.

Mrs. Voyd bowed and went away. When she got home she found her husband ready for their departure.

"Oh! Vypar," she said, "what do you think? Poor Mr. Sebright and his father called on you this morning, and as you were out they went on to those dreadful Frowdes. Isn't it a pity?"

"A great pity," said the vicar slowly. "If I had been at home I might have prevented it. Did you see them?"

"Yes, I was in Miss Tattleton's shop getting something I wanted, and I saw them drive past, and went out to speak to them. They said they had called on important business."

"Dear me, it's a great pity I was not at

home, and how vexing that they should have gone round to the Frowdes. Mrs. Sebright is so excessively anxious that the intimacy should be stopped. I fear I may have lost a great opportunity."

"I told them we should be back on Monday," said Mrs. Voyd.

"What did they say?"

"That they would call next week."

"I very much fear the influence of those Frowdes. You see they are fascinating people, and there is no knowing what consequences—serious consequences—may result from an interview between them and old Mr. Sebright. I am sorry—exceedingly sorry—that I was not at home. I might have been the means of doing much good."

"Well, Vypar, it can't be helped. I've heard something more about the Temples."

"What is it?" said the Vicar quickly.

"Why, there's another gentleman mixed

up with Miss Temple now; he's staying with Mr. Forncett, and he was in Miss Tattleton's shop yesterday talking about her."

"A most extraordinary infatuation," said Mr. Voyd. "I can see nothing in the girl myself. Who is the gentleman?"

"Miss Tattleton didn't know his name. He said he was going to see her in London, but I rather fancy, from Miss Tattleton's account, she settled him, for she told him a bit of her mind concerning the hussy."

"I'm sure I'm glad to hear it, for I hope she will not entrap any good man. You see that sort of thing runs in families, and her mother was bad."

And this worthy and pious couple, after further discussing the wickednesses of their neighbours, mounted the high cart which they drove and started for the Rev. Uriah Urgent's, at Battlefield.

As they turned the corner by Miss Tattle-

ton's they came upon Biggins, who was just starting for a neighbouring town where he got his provisions. He had been in his time a good rider and driver, and had even been brought before the magistrates for furious driving, but he had now grown so heavy that he found it impossible to mount into a high cart, so he used to drive a low poney carriage.

This carriage, which held four, he generally filled with low fellows of his own sort, men who toadied to him, for he liked to be king amongst his associates—a brutal king of a set of brutes—and as they passed anyone of whom they did not approve they shouted out some coarse remark. The presence of a lady did not deter Biggins from using obscene language or brutal oaths.

Now Biggins had just shouted out something very ugly to a group of people who were Manly Frowde's visitors, when the

vicar came upon him rather suddenly.

Biggins and his rough followers immediately looked sanctimonious. The vicar pretended to hear nothing, for Biggins was a useful man. He gave his saintly smile to all four occupants of the carriage, though they were men who never entered a church, and a strong suspicion of poaching and thieving was attached to all of them.

When the Vicar's cart had passed, Biggins put his tongue in the side of his mouth, and his three followers, who watched his every movement, gave a fiendish grin. As he passed Winterslow he said,

"I suppose we shan't hear no more of them for a time. I guess *he's* got rid of them. Odd doings there, they say. I never thought no good of them myself. Don't believe in people with them furrineering servants."

Biggins's strictures on what he believed to

be the sins of the Temples were curious, seeing his own domestic relations concerning wives and children were exceedingly complicated, and not at all in accordance with the laws of the country. But then what was that to anybody but himself? as Biggins would observe. At any rate, Mr. Voyd did not seem to think it necessary to interfere; perhaps because Biggins had a very uncomfortable way of treating anybody that *did* interfere with him. His appearance was not altogether pleasant, and that, coupled with the way in which he would bring down his fist on the table, as he swore some nasty-sounding oath, made him an object of fear, if not of reverence. Moreover, he had always half a dozen low creatures ready to do anything he required, whether it was breaking windows, or cutting down shrubs, or destroying flower-beds, or flinging stones on people who were quietly sitting or walking

in a garden, or throwing dirt into the water-supply, or any other horrible thing. Therefore Biggins was rather feared in the neighbourhood. So the Vicar found that not only was he an unpleasant enemy, but that he could be useful if cultivated. Thus the shortcomings of Biggins and his brutal followers were overlookod.

Mr. Voyd's object in going to Battlefield was to "change Sundays" with the Rev. Uriah Urgent. The latter gentleman considered it was good for his parish to be relieved of the monotony of one clergyman, so he occasionally changed with neighbouring brethren of the cloth. Besides giving his parishioners a change, this saved himself and his brother clergymen from having to produce a new sermon every Sunday. This arrangement was very convenient as giving the clergymen a little change, and a little less to do in sermon-writing, but it was

hardly a compliment to the parishioners to suppose that they got tired of their spiritual teacher.

So on this Saturday afternoon the Rev. Vypar Voyd went, accompanied by his wife and two of his old sermons, to Battlefield, and the Rev. Uriah Urgent walked up to Copse Hill on Sunday morning, armed with an unctuous address, which had been preached in most of the neighbouring churches, and slightly altered, to suit some of the notorious Copse Hill sinners.

CHAPTER X.

MARSTON SEBRIGHT AT COPSE HILL.

The confirmed gossip is always either malicious or ignorant. The one variety needs a change of heart, and the other a change of pasture. Gossip is always a personal confession either of malice or imbecility, and the young should not only shun it, but, by the most thorough culture, relieve themselves from all temptation to indulge in it. It is a low, frivolous, and too often a dirty business. There are country neighbourhoods in which it rages like a pest. Churches are split in pieces by it. Neighbours are made enemies by it for life. In many persons it degenerates into a chronic disease which is practically incurable. Let the young cure it while they may.

WHEN Mrs. Voyd left the Sebrights at Manly Frowde's gate, Jack ran across the lawn to find his friends.

"Oh! here comes Jack," said Mrs. Frowde, clapping her hands with delight, for she had been wondering why so many days passed without news of him, and she began to fear that he had found difficulties with respect to Kate.

Manly Frowde got up and opened a French window, and the three dogs all woke up from a comfortable sleep on the hearth-rug and rushed out barking to greet Jack.

"Is it all settled?" said Mrs. Frowde, before anyone had time to exchange greetings.

"No," said Jack, with a long face, "but my father's at the gate."

"Is he?" said Manly Frowde; "you stay here, I'll go and bring him in. I'll introduce myself."

"Whatever is the matter, Jack?" said Mrs. Frowde. "Won't your father agree to it?"

"We haven't got as far as that," said Jack. "The thing is that I can't possibly ask Mr. Temple."

"But why?"

"Oh! Mr. Voyd has managed to make very serious mischief."

"But surely Mr. Temple can see what manner of man Mr. Voyd is, and he'll not be influenced by anything he says."

"No; but Mr. Voyd conveyed a message from my mother to Mr. Temple, and Mr. Temple wrote such a reply that quite puts it out of my power to ask him if I may have Kate."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Frowde, in great distress, "can't something be done? We really must see what can be done. I'm so glad your father is here. Here he comes."

Manly Frowde, who had taken Marston Sebright's arm and was leading him round the path to the door, had a happy expres-

sion on his face, as much as to say, "Now I've got hold of a man after my own heart, and we'll have an intellectual feast."

Mrs. Frowde was introduced.

"It gives me very great pleasure to see you here," she said, showing the pleasure plainly in her face.

"And I am very glad to meet your husband," said Marston Sebright. "I've often wished to see him."

"How ungallant of you, father!" said Jack. "You should have returned Mrs. Frowde's compliment instead of paying it to her husband."

"To speak of one is to include both," said Frowde.

"Do let me offer you lunch," said Mrs. Frowde. "We have not long since finished breakfast, for we have some lazy visitors here, and the breakfast-table shall quickly be converted into the lunch-table."

"You have visitors?" said Jack.

"Yes, some favourites of yours, Jack," said Frowde. "Diana and Claudia Selfe. Harry Branscombe too arrived last night to help us to entertain the ladies."

"We're in the way, I fear," said Mr. Sebright.

"Oh, not at all," said Frowde. "The young people are looking about in the village."

Manly Frowde and Marston Sebright found so many subjects in common that Jack began to think they would forget all about his affairs, which seemed to him the most important thing in the world.

They went on from one subject to another, playing as it were with each; thought after thought coming from them in easy, brilliant speech, their faces lighted up with intellectual fire.

Mrs. Frowde looked on, enchanted; and

Jack no doubt would have appreciated it at any other time; but at present it seemed to him cruel that they could be discussing anything besides his troubles. He forgot that these troubles did not assume such magnitude in any other eyes than his own.

He made an impatient movement, and Mrs. Frowde, looking round at him, read his thoughts, and took pity on him.

At the next convenient period in the conversation she made a move to leave the table, and they all went into the book-room.

"I'm afraid, Frowde," said Marston Sebright, "you'll hardly have any patience with the love sorrows of a youngster. My boy here believes you have power to do anything, and as his course of true love seems to be running not smoothly, he wants you to help him in the difficulty."

"Of course I will," said Frowde.

Manly Frowde was a man who could talk seriously enough on any subject. He could discuss theology with a parson, or politics with a statesman, or tactics with a soldier. He was a man of wonderful information; not the sort of information that can be found in treasuries of knowledge, or dictionaries, or encyclopedias, or general reference books, for, as he said, he could get all that on his bookshelves, and there was no occasion to carry it about with him. But he was a well-read man, and in reading he knew what to remember and what to disregard. Therefore his mind was well stored, and he knew how to make good use of the storage.

But if Manly Frowde had never read a book at all, he would probably have been a remarkable man all the same. For he was an original thinker. He seemed to be a specially gifted man. It was impossible to

live with him without feeling that he was divinely gifted.

And this clever man, who could gravely discuss any serious or deep question, was so young and fresh at heart that he could sympathise with young people, and when in their presence would seem like a big, happy boy.

Mr. Voyd was right when he described him as a "fascinating" man. There were many who would agree with Mr. Voyd in that; not people only; for Manly Frowde had friends amongst the robins, and blackbirds, and thrushes, and tomtits, and chaffinches, and other birds in his garden; and surely they were fascinated, to be on such friendly terms with him. The old jackdaw, and the owls, and the pigeons, and the dogs would also have echoed Mr. Voyd's sentiment, for they all believed their master was a very great man. The old big dog

not only thought his master the greatest of men, but thought himself the greatest of dogs because he belonged to such a master. Even the torpid old tortoise that used to crawl about the lawn showed an affection for his big, boyish master, and would put out his head to be stroked when he came near.

Yes, Mr. Voyd was right. Manly Frowde was a fascinating man. But he was something more. He did not use his powers of fascination for mere sport, or from a desire to please and to gain good opinion, but because he could not help himself. He was full of love and humanity, and that love and humanity seemed to perpetually surround him and attract living creatures to him.

To people who loved him he seemed almost divine, though he had faults like all other human beings; but to many he ap-

peared to be only a poor scribbler, making a struggle for a living, or as William Black, the novelist, put it, "what might by courtesy be called a living."

To Jack Sebright he was a very great man.

He could laugh and talk and sympathise with Jack as if they were a couple of boys together, though he was nearly twice Jack's age; and yet Jack knew that behind all that there was wonderful power. In Jack's mind the power seemed even greater than it really was. Therefore he fancied that, if anyone could remove his difficulties, Mr. Frowde was the man.

"And what's the difficulty, Jack," said Frowde, in a light buoyant way, as if difficulties were easily got over. "Is the little lady unwilling?"

"No," said the father, "he made sure of the lady before consulting the parents: we

didn't do that in our days, did we, Frowde?" and Marston Sebright gave Manly Frowde a sly look.

"Lovers were alike in all ages, I fear," said Frowde, laughing.

"No, our difficulty is," said Marston Sebright, "that there's been some little mischief made. Your Vicar here, who seems to be an admirable young man so far as his priestly duty is concerned, has been somewhat officious concerning Jack's affairs. Mrs. Sebright thinks that the young man is much attached to Jack, and was anxious to prevent him from making an unsuitable marriage. I only know Temple as a public man, but I should hardly imagine that such a man would bring up his daughter to be so loose a character as your Vicar describes her to be."

"Our little Kate a loose character. Good heavens! Mr. Sebright, what do they mean?"

said Mrs. Frowde. She spoke so excitedly that the dogs thought there was something the matter, and started up to bark at the enemy.

"Yes, doggies, you may well bark when you hear such a wicked thing about our Kate."

Big Dog looked pathetically at his mistress, as if to say, "Tell me where to find the scoundrel who said it, and I'll make short work of him."

Mrs. Frowde had been so startled at this accusation against Kate, who seemed to her like a beautiful rosebud, that she had used strong language.

We have Shakespeare's authority that a lady may use an oath, for he makes Hotspur say to his wife,

> . . . in good sooth! Heart! you swear like a comfit-maker's wife. "Not you, in good sooth," and "As true as I live," and, "As God shall mend me," and, "As sure as day."

And givest such sarcenet surety for thy oaths.
As if thou never walk'st further than Finsbury.
Swear me, Kate, like a lady as thou art,
A good mouth-filling oath, and leave "in sooth,"
And such protest of pepper ginger-bread,
To velvet-guards and Sunday citizens.

But Shakespeare did not leave on record what a lady's oath should be, and 'tis still only a very "sarcenet surety" that is allowed to them.

"My dear lady," said Marston Sebright, when the dogs were quieted, "I'm only too glad to see in your face that the vile accusations against Miss Temple have no truth in them. I did not believe them for a moment. That poor young man" (alluding to the Vicar) "is evidently the victim of some gossip-loving women. He no doubt means well, but he seems to believe everything he is told. He is, perhaps, not quite the sort of man for the priestly office, but, holding the office, we must believe that he acts with the best in-

tentions, and according to his conscience. There is a certain class of people who, having no resources in themselves, must seek excitement for the mind somewhere, and gossip forms an easy excitement. To these people, who are much to be pitied, there is a particular fascination in discussing their neighbours' affairs. They are generally people with morbid imaginations, and, by the help of these imaginations, they add little by little to everything they hear, till they make up a monstrous story. They may perhaps suffer physically from an excess of gall in the blood. It has often been observed that these people are, for the most part, great tea-drinkers, but what affinity there is between the chemical properties of tea and the minds of these people, I have not yet taken time to investigate, although I think it might be worth while to do so, and also to find out how this vice

or disease of gossip might be so turned into a useful channel as to become a virtue. It is argued by many that every particular vice is an excess of some particular virtue; but I have not studied the subject sufficiently to give an opinion on it. It is evident that at present we have to deal with a question in which difficulties have been made by some of these unfortunate people who are given to gossiping, and we must find out whether the mischief can be undone."

Jack is wishing his father wouldn't stop to go into the philosophy of gossip. He wants to bring out the whole story at once to Manly Frowde, and ask him what can be done.

"I daresay we shall manage it between us," said Frowde cheerfully.

He saw how serious and impatient Jack looked.

"Look here, Frowde," said Jack, talking

very quickly, "this is what it is: you know when I came here the other day, and told you what mother had heard from Mr. Voyd, you advised me to tell father all about it. Well, the doctor was there, and I couldn't tell him at once, so I told mother all about it, and said I was waiting to tell father. Mother got in a dreadful way, and said it was impossible I could marry Kate, and showed me a letter from Mr. Temple to her. It seems that Voyd took upon himself to give a message from mother to Mr. Temple about Kate and me, and Mr. Temple wrote the letter and took Kate away. Where's the letter, father? Show it to Mr. Frowde." Jack was excited.

Manly Frowde read the letter first; then his wife read it.

"What a wicked shame!" she exclaimed. "That is why they went away so suddenly. How can anyone be so wicked?"

"We do not know Mr. Temple very intimately," said Manly Frowde. "Still, if we could see him, we might make matters straight. He is in town at present."

"Do you think Kate knows anything of it?" said Jack to Mrs. Frowde. "I fear she may be in great distress about it."

"I think not. But I have not heard from her for about a week, when I told her Mr. Temple would probably hear from you soon."

At this moment Claudia Selfe and Harry Branscombe, accompanied by Mr. Forncett and Harry Rivers, appeared in the garden.

"Here are our young people," said Frowde, "bringing Forncett and his friend with them. By-the-way," he said, turning to Marston Sebright, "this is the man who can probably be of most use to us in this matter. I'll mention it to him presently. He's a man worth knowing—a brother

of Lord Ravensbourne. His brother has the estates, and he the brains—an equal division," he said, laughing.

CHAPTER XI.

A CONSULTATION.

Good morrow, Gossip Joan,
  Where have you been a-walking?
I have for you at home
  A budget full of talking.

Old Song.

WHEN Mr. Forncett and the young people went into the cottage, Diana was not with them. She had run across to the post-office to transact some business. If Miss Tattleton had been in a good temper she would no doubt have had something pleasant to say to Diana. For, although her remarks were occasionally some-

what coarse, still she had a kindly way of "chaffing" young people about sweethearts or marriage. The social position of a person made no difference to her. She was free with all. But she happens on this occasion to be in a very bad temper, because of the missing parcel, for which, of course, John got blamed.

"So you've come to have another look at the old place again," said Miss Tattleton. "I wonder you young ladies don't get married, especially with such a lot of gentlemen as you're always meeting over there," pointing to the Cottage.

"We are very happy as we are," said Diana, in a pleasant tone.

Miss Tattleton had seen Diana and Claudia chatting with Mr. Forncett and his friend.

"It's no good setting your cap at either of them," she said, pointing to Mr. Forncett's house. "They're taken up already

with the girl over the way, only she can't make up her mind which to have. They're going up to London after her."

Diana always had wit enough to take anyone's mood, and give an answer. She was excessively graceful in her movements, and a very good actress. She would mimic a voice or manner admirably, and yet do it all with such grace. She said, in a half-serious, half-comic tone,

"Dear me, how very sad! Of course I've set my cap at Mr. Forncett. Is there *no* hope? What can we do with that girl over the way?"

She imitated Miss Tattleton's voice, as she repeated her phrases, and yet she did it all so prettily, and then dropped a curtsey, and ran out of the shop.

Miss Tattleton had meant to be spiteful. She knew she had the advantage of everyone round Copse Hill in saying spiteful

things more spitefully than anyone else, and in mimicking a tone or manner. She had made many a woman go out of her shop feeling very uncomfortable at some spiteful remark. She never attacked anyone who was likely to be able to give a ready answer; she chose as her victims gentle creatures who were easily frightened. She knew that a lady could not very well answer without appearing unladylike, but Miss Selfe had answered her, and mimicked her, and done it all without in the least losing her dignity.

Diana ran over to the Cottage, and found everyone chatting pleasantly. Jack's affairs had been dropped for the present. When she had been introduced to Marston Sebright, and everyone was at ease, she said,

"Oh! Mr. Forncett and Mr. Rivers, I've heard such shocking things about you. And

I've heard it on the very best authority, from the village chronicler. Oh! you dreadful men, I shall give information to the police."

"What is it?" they said, laughing.

"And you coolly ask what is it, when you know you're going to fight a duel about Kate Temple?"

"Fight a duel about Kate Temple!" they both exclaimed.

"Oh, you need not be so innocent about it—you know it's quite true. But there, that's just like you faithless men. There's no chance for me, I see. Oh, my poor broken heart!" She acted all this so well that everyone was laughing. "And now, Jack," she said, jumping up, "I'm told I'm not to set my cap at Mr. Forncett or Mr. Rivers, so I'm going to set it at you. How ought I to do it?" she said, going to a mirror and re-arranging a bit of muslin and

ribbon that was on her head. "This way or this? Should the bow be at the back or front, or right or left? You know, Jack, you used to flirt with Kate, and now you can't have her, won't you have me? I shall make a splendid bishopess."

Diana went and stood before Jack with her little cap perched on one side of her head, looking very comical, but she saw an odd expression in Jack's face, and then ever so many thoughts ran through her mind in a moment. Was there really something the matter about Kate? Was Mr. Forncett or Mr. Rivers in love with her, and had she given up Jack?

She saw there was something that gave him pain when she mentioned Kate, and she tried to turn the subject, but she could think of nothing to say. Then fell one of those awkward silences which come some-

times when an unpleasant subject has been mentioned accidentally.

Claudia, who was sitting by Jack, saw the sudden change of expression in her sister's face, and tried to come to the rescue by making an appropriate remark. But she could think of nothing, so she nervously said,

"What a lovely day it has been!"

But this only seemed to make a deeper silence. Presently Manly Frowde said—

"Without any joking, Diana, what was the nonsense you heard about the duel? Did you invent it?"

"I invented the duel, but I was seriously told not to set my cap (that was the expression) at Mr. Forncett or Mr. Rivers."

"By Miss Tattleton, I suppose?" said Frowde.

"Yes; she seemed rather out of temper."

"That's the woman who was so impudent

to me yesterday," said Harry Rivers; "she made some very unpleasant remarks about Miss Temple."

"Now, Mr. Sebright, you see the origin of the mischief," said Frowde.

"'Tis wonderful!—'tis marvellous!" said Marston Sebright, "that a mere uneducated village shopkeeper should be the organ of so much mischief. But she would be powerless, except amongst her own class, unless some person in authority carried away her tales; for surely well-bred people do not concern themselves with village gossips."

"I fear that 'some person in authority' has carried the tale on this occasion."

Mrs. Frowde, thinking that Jack would not like the matter discussed before so large a party, drew away the young people, and left her husband and the Sebrights and Frank Forncett together, returning presently herself.

The matter was quickly explained to Forncett.

Mr. Frowde, knowing the bond of union between him and the Temples, fancied he would be the best person to speak to Mr. Temple.

"You see, Mr. Forncett," said Marston Sebright, "the error has arisen through Mrs. Sebright placing faith in Mr. Voyd. She is over-anxious about our son, and as he and Voyd were at college together, she naturally thought Voyd was earnest in what he said; and no doubt he was, but the poor young man is not quite so prudent as he should be, and has an unfortunate habit of listening to all the old womanish tales he hears."

Jack felt inclined to confess that he was at fault in leading his mother to suppose that he visited the vicar when he came so often to Copse Hill. He could have con-

fessed it to Mrs. Frowde, but felt a little frightened of the men.

"I've no doubt I shall be able to explain the matter satisfactorily to Temple," said Forncett. "I am going to town in a few days—I cannot exactly say which day—and I will make a point of calling on Mr. Temple at once," which Frank Forncett would have done in any case, for he had other reasons for calling on Mr. Temple.

"Don't you think," said Frowde, quite unconscious of the grave charge against him concerning Kate, "that the vicar should be acquainted with the mischief he has caused, and be made to send an apology to Mr. Temple for the terms in which he has mentioned Miss Temple?"

"I mean to make him do it," said Jack vehemently. "He shall retract every bit of it; and make the most abject apology."

"Yes; we'll see to that," said Marston

Sebright. "We called on him to-day for an explanation, but he was out, and we'll call early in next week."

"How soon do you think you'll see Mr. Temple?" said Jack to Mr. Forncett.

Jack was in a hurry.

"I can hardly tell you yet. Perhaps I might carry a letter from you?" he said, looking mischievously at Jack.

"That wouldn't be a bad idea. Shall you have gone by Tuesday? We shall be over here then. Father," he said, turning to Marston Sebright, "shall we come over on Tuesday to see Voyd?"

"Perhaps we shall, but don't be in a hurry, my boy—don't be in a hurry; a day or two will not make much difference."

But every day was an age to Jack.

When he could get Mrs. Frowde aside he said,

"May I send her a little note through

you? and you will cheer her up, won't you? I'm so afraid she may have heard of all this. Thank you so much," and he showed his gratitude in his face.

The party soon joined again, and were all very merry. Jack began to have hope, so regained his usual spirits. Diana and Claudia saw the change in him, and wondered what it all meant, but were waiting patiently till Mrs. Frowde should tell them. The two Harrys were full of fun and mad pranks, though Harry Branscombe was some dozen years older than Harry Rivers. He was always called "old Harry" at the Cottage, and was a favourite with the ladies, and the men too. Mrs. Frowde had a great belief in "old Harry," and though she was fond of making matches amongst her young people, she would have very reluctantly spared Harry Branscombe.

Marston Sebright and his son had to

leave before sunset, as the cross country roads were not in good condition.

Jack looked gratefully at his friends as he bade them good-bye; and as he shook hands with Diana he gave a look, as much as to say, "It's all right now."

The Sebrights had quite a large party to see them off from the gate of the Cottage, and as they went round the corner by Miss Tattleton's, Jack turned and waved his hand.

"Ah!" grunted Miss Tattleton, watching them through the shop-window, her temper not improved since Diana's visit, "that's one of the men that came dangling after the girl opposite. I wonder who the old 'un is!"

CHAPTER XII.

KATE'S TROUBLES.

From you, Ianthe, little troubles pass—
As little ripples from the shining river.

LANDOR.

MR. TEMPLE and his family were staying at an old-fashioned hotel in Old Burlington Street. After the communication he received from Leonora concerning Kate and Jack, he thought he might perhaps hear something of Jack shortly. He was not disposed to entertain any proposal from him, for he felt that Kate had been grossly insulted by the family. He was hoping that she was not seriously in love

with the boy, and that she would soon forget him.

Leonora told Kate nothing more than that no letter had been received from Jack.

A week passed, and still there was no sign. Poor little Kate was getting very miserable. She had the consolation of talking to Leonora about it, but she noticed that Leonora did not encourage the subject. She felt certain there was something wrong. She wanted to write and ask Mrs. Frowde about it, but Leonora advised her not to do so, and told her to wait patiently.

Mr. Temple and Leonora both feared that Jack had heard some unpleasant stories of Kate, and believed them, and had therefore given up all idea of asking for her; and although Mr. Temple had no wish that Kate should marry, yet he did not like the idea of her being deserted by a lover be-

cause she was supposed to have behaved in an unbecoming way.

He was discussing the matter with Leonora on the Saturday that Jack was telling his troubles to the Frowdes. Leonora, seeing that Kate's health was materially affected, was impressing on her brother that something should be done.

"I do not quite see what *is* to be done," said Temple. "If these scandalous reports have induced Mr. Sebright to give up Kate, he can scarcely be worth having. He ought to know how much such gossip is worth."

"But you know, William, how much can be done with a plausible tongue; and the word of a clergyman carries so much weight with it. I think it is likely that very serious mischief has been made, and I am in distress at poor Kate's state of mind. I would do anything that would be likely to set matters right."

"So would I, my dear; but we hear nothing from the young man, and I cannot possibly speak to him till I hear from him."

"Don't you think it would be well to see Mr. Frowde about it, as he is Jack's friend? He is a man of good judgment."

"I think it would not be at all the thing that I should make any advances in the matter, or show any anxiety about it. If the young man loves Kate, he will allow nothing to stand in his way. If he does not come forward, Kate must bear the disappointment. She is very young, and it is not likely to make any impression on her. We must move about a bit. I'll wait till Forncett comes, to know what his arrangements are, and then we'll be on the move. We had better not go back to Winterslow till this miserable gossip is forgotten, lest Kate may hear of it."

"I am going to write a line to Frank,"

said Leonora. "I suppose it would do no harm just to say something of the matter to him. He might perhaps, by a word or two with Mr. Frowde, find out how matters stand."

"Forncett is so judicious a man that no mischief can come out of anything you say to him, so write as you like."

Pretty little Kate went wearily to bed every night, wondering what was wrong. She thought Leonora knew more about it than she chose to tell, and she often tried to get her to talk about it. It was only lately that she had begun to understand what disgrace was attached to her mother. She had questioned Leonora so closely that she thought it best to tell the child exactly what happened rather than let her form all sorts of wild theories about it. She wondered over and over again whether Jack had heard this, and therefore would not marry

her, and she always tried to console herself with the idea that Jack loved her so very much that he would not give her up for that.

If she could only see him for a few minutes, she thought, everything would be right. Then she wondered how much longer her papa's business would keep him in London, and she asked often when they were going back to Winterslow. Then she longed to ask Mrs. Frowde all about it, she felt sure she must know, and that she she could make matters right. Then she tried very hard to bear it all bravely, and not seem to be different from what she always was. But her father could see a very great difference in her, and he was not comfortable about it. In the first place he was jealous that the child should love another man better than himself. He did not admit this to himself; but undoubtedly

he felt it. She had been everything in the world to him. His sister was his companion, but the child had his passionate love. He thought Jack Sebright a fine manly fellow, but he felt a little bitter against him for taking his child's love from him. Then why had Jack burdened the child with a secret all these months and made her deceitful to her father? And why didn't he come now in a straightforward way and ask for the child? And if he had heard the gossip, why didn't he go and horse-whip the man who had said such vile things of Kate? These and various other things passed through Mr. Temple's mind and made him decide that Jack was not what he ought to be. So there was not much chance for Jack when the time should come, and his chances grew less every day, for Mr. Temple was disgusted at having to be at a dull hotel in town instead of enjoy-

ing the country air and the society of Frank Forncett, and he seemed to consider it was all through Jack that he had to be there. Jack, he argued, had no right to engage himself secretly to the child, and then behave in such a manner as to allow of comment being made.

So altogether he was very angry with him.

CHAPTER XIII.

A LETTER FROM LEONORA.

A she-correspondent for me, always provided she does not cross.

ISAAC DISRAELI.

ON Sunday morning Frank Forncett was gladdened by a letter from Leonora. It was one of those charming letters which only women can write. A mere friendly letter—for were not Frank and Leonora to be always *friends*—but to Frank every word was precious.

In the afternoon he walked over to the Cottage with it, to show Mrs. Frowde the part relating to Kate. She had already

written to Kate, and had tried, as well as she could, to find excuses for Jack's not having written or called, without telling the actual truth. She had been unable to post her letter because the post goes out from Copse Hill early on Sundays, and there would not be another post out till Monday evening. She re-opened her letter, and sent more words of comfort for Kate, telling her to wait only a few days more and all would come right. And she knew Jack's little enclosure would cheer her. She felt anxious about Kate's health, and asked Mr. Forncett if he would not hurry his visit to town, that he might make matters right with Mr. Temple, and smooth the way for Jack, so that everything could be settled speedily.

"I suppose I had better wait till I see the impetuous youth on Tuesday," said Frank, "you may depend upon it he'll give his father no peace till he comes. Then I'll

start at once when I've seen him, and go straight to Temple. Will that satisfy you?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Frowde, "I'm anxious about it because I led the child to believe more than a week ago that Jack was then going to speak to her father, and I feel that I am to blame for having done so, as she is now suffering from the uncertainty and delay."

On Monday the letter to Kate, containing the little note from Jack, was posted. Also a short letter from Mrs. Frowde to Jack, begging him to come on Tuesday, if he possibly could. He did not need any begging.

Marston Sebright saw how anxious his boy was to have the matter settled, and he felt for him, though he pretended to take it very quietly. Jack knew he would go with him on Tuesday, though he could not get him to promise.

On Tuesday morning, at breakfast, while Jack was all eagerness, waiting to see what his father would say, Marston Sebright after leisurely reading his letters, said quietly, as if it were of no importance,

"Well, Jack, what do you think of to-day for our visit to the Vicar of Copse Hill? It seems tolerably fine, I think we might as well get it over."

"All right, father," said Jack, "I'm quite ready to start when you are."

So the father and son were soon on their way, in the dog-cart. Impetuous Jack was relieving his feelings by abusing the Vicar.

"Don't be abusive, Jack," said his father. "It is not worth your while to lower yourself by using such language, for the sake of a young puppy who sins from stupidity rather than vice. He is like a young dog who wants taking by the scruff of the neck by a bigger dog, to be shaken into his place.

Perhaps after a few mistakes of this sort, he'll become wiser."

"In the meantime," said Jack, "people must, I suppose, suffer for his mistakes. That's the worst part of it. Let's just go round to the Frowdes first for a moment, father, to see if there's any news."

Jack did not know the postal arrangements at Copse Hill on Sunday, and thought perhaps Mrs. Frowde might have written by Sunday's post to Kate, and therefore there might be a little answer from her this morning.

But in this he was disappointed. Mrs. Frowde told him that Mr. Forncett thought of going that afternoon, but she did not mention Kate's being out of health, as she knew the boy's impetuous character, and did not know what he might do.

She recommended them to go and see Mr. Voyd at once, and, if possible, to get a

written apology that Mr. Forncett might carry with him, as it would help very much in pacifying Mr. Temple; and she in the meantime would ask Mr. Forncett to come over to the Cottage, that Jack might see him when he returned from the Vicarage.

They found the Vicar at home, also Mrs. Voyd, and two of what were called in the neighbourhood "the Urgent girls." Some of the Urgent girls were much given to giggling, and as the two present had heard all the scandal about Kate Temple and Jack Sebright, and had, in fact, only just been discussing it, they regarded him with great interest, and sat in a corner of the room nudging one another, and giggling.

Marston Sebright endeavoured to be polite while the weather and other general subjects were discussed, though he felt out of patience. Mrs. Voyd's manner was particularly irritating to him. Hardly a word

could be got out of Jack. He showed his disgust in his face. Mrs. Voyd tried her most insinuating ways with him, but he would not be friendly.

Presently Marston Sebright mentioned to the Vicar that he and his son had merely called on business, and that perhaps he could give them a few minutes of his time.

The Vicar therefore led the way into his study. When they had left the room the two girls burst out into a laugh.

"Do be quiet, Emily," said one, giving the other a great nudge. "They'll hear you."

"It isn't me," said the other, "it's you. I say, isn't he handsome?"

"Yes," said the sister; "and what a shame for that nasty girl to catch him!"

"Oh! but she hasn't caught him yet," said Emily.

"I don't call him so handsome," said Mrs.

Voyd, "I call him a rude, rough fellow. He'd hardly answer me when I spoke to him. He used to be so different. I suppose it is associating with those horrid people. I do hope Vypar may be the means of preventing it."

"And he's just going to be ordained, isn't he?" said Emily. "Oh, he'd make such a nice curate for papa. I wonder whether he has means, because pa won't engage one without means."

"I'm sure papa would not have him while he has so many objectionable acquaintances," said Mrs. Voyd.

"Oh! but if he got under pa's and ma's management," said one of the sisters, "he'd soon give them up, and then he'd know only our set, and he'd be so nice, I know he would."

"I'm sure he'd intone beautifully," said the other, "he's got such a lovely voice.

Do you think he'll come in again before he goes?"

"You silly girl," said Mrs. Voyd. "You've got your head full of him. I don't see anything remarkable in him. He was a very nice young man before he took up so much with the Frowdes and Temples, and I am in hopes Vypar may bring him round again to what he used to be. I know Vypar intends to tell the father to-day what sort of people his son associates with."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PARSON'S STUDY.

An' please, your reverence, I've brought you a sack of the best kidneys, as you said in your sermon yesterday that the *commun taters* did not agree with you.

Old Tale.

THE Vicar's study was a small room furnished with just a few books and necessary writing apparatus. The books were rather oddly chosen. The Vicar had not much literature, as may be judged from the fact that, when he was practising a part-song for the penny reading at Copse Hill (he had a mild tenor voice, and belonged to a musical society), he remarked that the

words of the song were so stupid. They were only from Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*. He knew nothing about Coleridge's *Church and State*, but he probably *thought* he knew all that a parson ought to know. There was such a delighful simplicity in the ignorance of this man. He was so certain he was going through life in the right way and knew all about it, and he did not hesitate to condemn any man who had not the same way of looking at the world as himself. He was quite sure *he* was right, at any rate. As to possessing brain, he had some sort of idea that it was rather a dangerous thing to possess. He thought that people with brain were generally fascinating, but bad, and must be avoided; and he avoided them accordingly. Perhaps they rather avoided him, for stupidity is excessively irritating to quick-brained people.

His study, therefore, was hardly well-

named, for study is impossible without brains; but this was the room where the complicated sermons, intended to set forth the doctrines of the Church, were compiled from the commentators; and this was where the commentators were consulted and the *Guardian* read. So, if the Rev. Vypar Voyd could be said to study, this was the room in which he did it.

Some socks were lying in the fender, for Mr. Voyd was in perpetual fear of rheumatism, so kept his socks aired by having them continually in the fender till they were wanted. He was also very particular about the airing of his surplice, and of the cushion on which he knelt in the reading-desk. It was one of the few weaknesses to which Mr. Voyd acknowledged, that he was very susceptible of cold.

Mr. Marston Sebright eyed the books somewhat curiously as he took a seat. Mr.

Voyd was nervous of Mr. Sebright. He was afraid that perhaps Mrs. Sebright had mentioned the matter to her husband, and he did not know how it would be taken. He could have encountered Jack very well, but he did not like the idea of Mr. Sebright. However, with that dogged sense of duty which he always had, he thought it right to assume the air of a person who has a great responsibility, and he made up his mind that, whatever were Mr. Sebright's opinions, one course lay straight before him, namely, to acquaint Mr. Sebright with the character of the people whom his son had chosen for associates.

"I am exceedingly glad," he began, "to have this opportunity of speaking with you, Mr. Sebright, for I have matters of importance—of very great importance—which I wish to communicate."

Mr. Sebright did not at all like the idea of

a long interview with this slow-thinking and slow-speaking man, so he said rather shortly—

"I do not wish to detain you long, I've merely come on a little matter of business, which can easily be settled."

Mr. Vypar Voyd was always put out when people were quick. His brain did not move fast enough.

"Indeed!" he said.

"Yes," said Mr. Sebright, "my son has proposed marriage to a lady in your parish —Miss Temple. That lady listened to his proposal, but my son was foolish enough to defer consulting her father till he should have some position. In the meantime, the young people, taking advantage of their secret betrothal, have, by their behaviour, given cause for comments. You have heard these comments, and, in your anxiety for my son, have conveyed them to his mother.

She, thinking to hide from me what she considered to be the ill-conduct of our boy, unfortunately acted without consulting me. Words dropped by her seem to have been carried to Mr. Temple, and he, supposing you had actually given him a message from Mrs. Sebright, replied with a most polite letter—a letter that puts it out of my son's power to ask for the hand of Miss Temple, unless some explanation is made. Such explanation must come from you, as the person through whom the error arose. All I have to ask, therefore, is that you will write a note to Mr. Temple that I may carry away with me, expressing to him your sorrow at your mistake."

"I can assure you," said Mr. Voyd, who had a certain amount of courage from the confidence that he had much worse things concerning Miss Temple to disclose—"I can solemnly assure you that I had no idea

my dear friend, your son, was engaged to Miss Temple."

"Of course not—how should you, as he did not think proper to tell even his parents?"

"If I had known, I should have made no remarks on the familiarities I saw pass between them."

"The brute!" thought Jack, "he's been watching behind a hedge when I kissed the darling."

"I am sorry—excessively sorry—to have said anything concerning your son's conduct which he did not deserve. I am too much interested in him not to be anxious—more than anxious—for his welfare."

"Ugh, the brute!" thought Jack.

"I am sure my son will forgive you—will you not, Jack?"

Jack looked anything but forgiveness.

"I hope, Mr. Sebright," said Mr. Voyd,

"that you are assured—quite assured—that I have your son's welfare at heart. Nobody can be more anxious for him than I am. If I thought that it were for his benefit to marry Miss Temple, I would be the first to congratulate him, and move every obstacle out of his way; but, believe me, I am in earnest—truly in earnest—when I say that I view such a union with horror—with absolute horror—for I have no opinion of either Miss Temple or her relations or associates."

"Sir, will you explain?" said Mr. Sebright severely.

"Miss Temple's conduct is the theme of common talk," said Mr. Voyd.

"Oh! I can quite understand that," said Mr. Sebright. "My son was foolish in making a secret engagement. He is answerable for what is said, and so long as the young lady herself is not cognisant of it, it is of

little consequence. Of course it would be unpleasant for her to know that any remarks were made."

"But you rather mistake me," said Mr. Voyd. "I mean that Miss Temple's conduct with regard to other gentlemen is such as to make her unworthy—altogether unworthy of my friend's love."

Jack began to fidget. "Wish the brute wouldn't call me his friend," he thought.

"Mere gossip, I suspect," said Mr. Sebright. "Pretty girl, probably—very young; how old did you say, Jack?"

"Nineteen, father."

"Ah! nineteen—quite a child. I daresay the men run after her. All women like admiration. It's born in them. I attach no importance to that sort of gossip. If you're satisfied, Jack, everyone else may be, eh?"

"Yes, sir," said Jack.

"But, Mr. Sebright, do allow me to impress—most emphatically impress—on you the importance attaching to your son's choice of a wife to help him in his career as a clergyman. I have proof—yes, actual proof—of Miss Temple's intimacy with at least one man, and there are sad reports of her behaviour with others."

"You have actual proof you say, Mr. Voyd? Pray show it unto me."

"I cannot at this moment show it, for I delivered it into her father's possession, thinking he was the proper man to hold it, and no doubt it was that, with other things, which made him remove his daughter so suddenly."

Marston Sebright looked at his son half doubtingly for a minute, as if it were perhaps possible that the vicar were right and his son had been deceived; but he saw it so plainly written on the boy's face that

he was certain of Kate, and certain, also, the vicar was wrong, that he doubted no more. He knew that his son had twenty times the sense of the vicar.

"Look here, Voyd," said Jack, who could bear it no longer. "Tell me all you have to say, and tell it quickly. I can bear anything, you needn't fear. I've heard so much of this nonsense, now let us know once for all exactly what it is, and have done with it."

"Be calm, Jack, be calm," said his father.

"Father, I cannot be calm. What man can be calm when he hears an innocent lady attacked?"

"Let us hear what Mr. Voyd has to say," said Mr. Sebright.

"I am sorry," said Mr. Voyd, "to give you a moment's uneasiness; but I can assure you I feel it my duty to tell you of what has come under my knowledge concerning

Miss Temple. Her behaviour with Mr. Forncett is very generally spoken of, and there are eye-witnesses to the fact that she has been seen with Mr. Frowde in the dusk of the evening conducting herself most familiarly with him—in fact, kissing him."

"How very horrid!" said Jack, in a comical tone. "I hope she'll go on kissing him. She will if she becomes my wife."

Mr. Voyd looked reproachfully at Jack, and evidently thought he was only joking.

"I hope you are not serious when you talk like that," said Mr. Voyd.

"Indeed I am," said Jack. "I reverence Mr. Frowde before any man in the world except my father."

"I am sorry—truly sorry—to hear you express such a sentiment, and hope you may some day be led to see your mistake."

"I have not yet," said Mr. Sebright quietly, "been shown the 'actual proof'

you mentioned of Miss Temple's misconduct."

"That," said Mr. Voyd, "I am unable at present to show you, as it lies in Mr. Temple's hands."

"What is it?"

"It consists of a letter inadvertently sent by Miss Temple to the laundress in the pocket of her dress——"

"And which," exclaimed Jack excitedly, "instead of being honourably returned, was read by scoundrels who——"

"Jack! Jack!" said his father, "moderate your vehemence. Proceed, Mr. Voyd."

"This letter, which was by accident read, when it was lying on the table at the laundress's, is couched in terms that no gentleman would use to a lady unless on the most familiar terms with her, or most intimately related."

"And Miss Temple *is* on intimate terms

with the Frowdes, so what's the harm," exclaimed Jack.

"I'm sorry—truly sorry—for your sake, Sebright, that Miss Temple is on such terms with them. When you know as much of them as I do, you will see the truth of what I say. I'm grieved—intensely grieved—that I am unable to convince you of the danger of associating with such a man as Frowde. That he's clever, I admit—remarkably clever—but his genius only makes him the more dangerous."

"I think, Mr. Voyd," said Mr. Sebright, rising from his seat, "that you may leave my son to the choice of his associates. I will be responsible for any mistake he may make. You have nothing further, I presume, to say of Miss Temple. Can you oblige me by just writing a few lines of apology to her father?"

"Really," said Mr. Voyd, "it gives me pain

—great pain—to refuse; but I do not at present feel that Miss Temple's character is altogether cleared from the imputations made on it."

"Then there is nothing more to be done, I think, Jack," said Mr. Sebright, glad of a chance of escape from a man who irritated him so much. "What do you say, Jack?"

"What I say, is," said impetuous Jack, "that I think Forncett and Frowde ought to be told to their face of these beastly imputations on—I mean," he said, thinking his father might be vexed with his language, "that Voyd ought to say what he has to say before them."

"I suppose Mr. Voyd has no objection, have you?"

"Certainly not," said Mr. Voyd, a little nervously.

"Not that Frowde is a man who would condescend to defend himself," said Jack.

"Perhaps we had better consult him first," said Mr. Sebright, "and hear what he says about it. An accusation against a man by the Vicar of his parish is a serious thing, or ought to be, and should either be substantiated or disproved. Mr. Frowde can no doubt enlighten us on the subject. We will see him at once. Good morning, Mr. Voyd."

The gentlemen departed, and the Urgent girls watched them from behind the curtains, giggling as usual.

CHAPTER XV.

JACK IMPATIENT.

> 'Tis all men's office to speak patience
> To those that wring under the load of sorrow;
> But no man's virtue, nor sufficiency,
> To be so moral, when he shall endure
> The like himself.
>
> *Much Ado about Nothing.*

WHEN Jack and his father arrived at the Cottage, they found there the same party they had met on Saturday. The ladies and Harry Branscombe and Harry Rivers had all in the meantime learnt the history of Jack's troubles, therefore, when he arrived on Tuesday, he was rather regarded as a hero, and much sympathy was felt, especially by the ladies. Diana and

Claudia, though they really felt sorry for the annoyance Jack had, were full of fun, and ready to "chaff" him pleasantly about his love-affairs.

"But oh! Di," said Claudia, when they were discussing Jack, "I'm just a little bit frightened of his father; he looks so severe —just like a bishop, and I am so frightened of bishops. We shall never dare to say such things before him."

"What nonsense!" said Diana. "You may depend on it that, however severe he looks, he isn't; you can see that by the way he manages his horse. I should never be frightened of a man who loves his horse so much."

When Marston Sebright greeted Mr. Forncett, he said,

"Here I am again, you see, letting that boy of mine make quite an old fool of me—running after a little girl of nineteen. I

think I've done all I can now, and must leave you and the youngsters to do the rest, as you are kind enough to interfere. I hope you may be successful."

Frank wished in his heart that there was as little difficulty in the way of obtaining Leonora as there seemed to him to be of getting Kate.

"And did you get the apology?" said Frowde.

"No; the vicar seemed to find it against his conscience to give it, and I'm sure I had no wish to force the young man's conscience," said Marston Sebright.

"Then he absolutely refuses it?"

"For the present he does."

"I suspect before long some other apologies will be required," said Jack.

"How?" said Manly Frowde.

"Oh! you very wicked man," said Jack, laughing.

"What have I done? I know the vicar has a long list of sins against me. Is there anything fresh?"

"You've kissed my Kate," said Jack.

"Many times, and hope to do so again," said Frowde.

"And you've written verses to her—'couched in the most familiar language.' Wasn't that the correct expression, father?"

"Something of that sort," said Marston Sebright.

"And have they made mischief of that?" said Mrs. Frowde.

"Yes."

"Oh, how delightful!" she said, clapping her hands, and the dogs all jumped up and joined in. "Why," she continued, "I helped to write them all. I generally tell Manly what to say, and he puts it into verse."

"Ah! but these verses must be something

you have not seen," said Jack to Mrs. Frowde, "because they're so very familiar. I believe Kate is positively addressed as 'dearest' in them."

"No doubt," said Mrs. Frowde. "It would depend whether 'dear' or 'dearest' suited the metre best."

"Now, really," said Diana, "we're not going to let Miss Temple have all the bad character to herself. We must claim some of it. Why, I've had ever so many kisses, and I'm going to have another too, you dear old boy," she said, going up to Manly Frowde and kissing him. "And as to verses, I'll be bound Miss Kate can't come up to us in that, for we've known him longer. Why, we've a heap of verses, and hope to have many more yet. If that's how Miss Temple lost her character, she may be proud of the loss; but we're not going to let her claim too large a share of our Manly

Frowde. He belongs to ever so many of us, and she is a new friend."

"But, Miss Diana," said Jack, "Kate got kissed in the lane there in 'the dusk of the evening.' Those last words have to be said in a mysterious whisper to give the full effect, don't they, father?"

Jack imitated Mr. Voyd's voice and manner as he said it.

"You bad boy!" said his father.

"I really must put in my claim now," said Claudia. "*I've* been kissed 'in the dusk of the evening.' Is that the right sort of whisper, Jack? I've been kissed many times in the dusk, and in the dark too. For when mamma lived at Winterslow, Manly Frowde always took us home when we had been to dine here, and, of course, I always kissed him when I said 'Good-bye.' Once I remember five gentlemen walked home with me when I had dined here."

"And did you kiss all five?" said Harry Rivers—"because I should like to have been one, if you did."

"No," said Claudia, putting on a pretty little dignified, cold manner; "it is only Mr. Frowde that the ladies kiss. He is a poet, and we consider it is an honour to kiss him."

"Oh, dear, how I wish I was a poet!" said Harry Rivers. "If I write you some verses, Miss Claudia, shall I be rewarded with a kiss?"

"Certainly not, sir. You must show you are a real troubadour like Manly Frowde before the ladies will reward you."

"What a lucky man you are, Frowde!" said Harry Rivers. "How I envy you!"

"You need hardly do that," said Manly Frowde. "I'm poor enough, for poetry won't bring money, though it brings kisses. Still I have what money won't buy—the loyal

love and friendship of some half-dozen true women. I would not change it for gold; but I should be sorry to see you have to battle with life as I have."

"Why, Manly," said Mrs. Frowde, "that sounds almost like a grumble; and you are always so content."

"So I am, my child—so I am. I only wanted to show this youngster that, if he envies me my kisses, he also has something which I have not."

"Ah, there's something else, Mr. Rivers," said Mr. Sebright, "you might envy Mr. Frowde besides the kisses. We all envy him not only his great powers of body and mind, but his way of exercising them. He has the satisfaction of knowing that he is of infinite use to many of his fellow-creatures."

"Such a sentiment from you," said Frowde, looking pleased, "is worth having. I thank

you for it, as I thank these ladies for their love. I need some championship with such a very formidable enemy as the vicar of the parish," he added, laughing, "and I'm proud of my champions."

"But who's going to defend you, Mr. Forncett?" said Jack. "You also are one of the wicked."

"What have I done?" said Frank.

"I don't know whether you've actually kissed my Kate——" began Jack.

"Indeed I have," interrupted Frank.

"Whatever you've done, it has to be mentioned in a most mysterious whisper;" and Jack lowered his voice in imitation of the vicar's again.

"Really, I plead guilty to having kissed the little lady several times in presence of her father. You see," he said gaily, trying to speak lightly of his misfortunes, "I claim a sort of uncleship. I just missed the

chance of being her uncle, and have ever since repented it."

"Then you would have been my uncle, Frank! What fun! I don't feel at all respectful towards you, old boy."

"You'd better take care, Jack. There's no knowing what may happen. He may some day be your uncle after all, and then he'll come down on you with avuncular severity," said Manly Frowde.

"But I haven't got the niece yet," said Jack solemnly, feeling that there was Mr. Temple to get over, after all, and he seemed a formidable person to Jack.

"I daresay we shall manage that," said Frank Forncett cheerfully. "I mean to go up this evening, and go straight to Temple, because Kate is not at all well, and the sooner it is settled the better."

"Kate ill!" said Jack.

"Well," said Forncett, "she is far from well."

"What *is* the matter?" exclaimed Jack hastily.

"Oh, it's nothing serious," said Frank; "but I don't quite know what it is." He felt that it was awkward to explain it all to Jack. "I have a letter from—from her aunt," he said nervously. After the confession that he might have been Kate's uncle, he found a difficulty in knowing what term to apply to Leonora. To him she was only Leonora. He could not make up his mind to call her Mrs. Lifton, and he felt that Miss Temple was incorrect, and might cause conjecture as to why there was any difficulty in the way of marrying her. If he spoke of her as Kate's aunt, everyone present would at once infer that she was connected with the uncleship he had so lately mentioned; and of course everyone did. He felt for the letter in his pocket, and producing it, he pointed

out a certain part to Jack, who read it.

"Oh, confound it!" said Jack. "Look here, father, I really must go up to town directly. Here's Kate very ill, and all through me—what a brute I am!" He reads—"'She is evidently suffering very much, but bears it bravely.' Of course she does—that's just like her. What a brute I am! Father, I really must go to town at once. Where is she, Mr. Forncett? Can I go with you? Of course she's very ill; she's heard all these vile things, I believe. Oh! how I hate interfering parsons! What time's the next train? Don't let us lose any time."

"Jack, my boy," said his father, "do take things more quietly. You have yourself to blame for making her keep the engagement secret."

"I do blame myself a thousand times, father, but that won't do any good. I must

go to her at once. What may she not have suffered? What a wretch I am!—it's all my fault!"

"I think, perhaps," said Forncett to Mr. Sebright, "it might not be amiss if your son came up to town with me. He can stay at my quarters. Rivers will remain a day or two with me, and they can take care of each other."

"You're very kind," said Marston Sebright. "I'm sure Jack ought to thank you. I'll beg his mother to send off what he may want directly I reach home. It shall be taken to the station this evening."

"How soon shall we go?" said Jack, all impatience.

"We must start in half an hour," said Frank, "so you'd better come over to The Birches at once; but when we reach town, you and Harry must go on to my hotel, and I will go straight to Temple at once."

"But why can't I come too?" said Jack.

"You wouldn't like to be refused admittance, would you?"

"No; but when shall I see Kate?"

"You must wait patiently till to-morrow morning."

So impetuous Jack had to make up his mind to wait till the next day.

CHAPTER XVI.

LORD ARUN VISITS MR. JOHNSON.

Ah, the good Priest I love—with ample mind,
True as an Angel, as a Father kind,
Who strives to follow where the Saviour trod,
Who knows the almighty charity of God.
He does not fidget about copes or chants,
Nor patronize parochial sycophants.

* * * * * * * *

No : on the glorious pedestal he stands,
Built by divine and apostolic hands,
High above that dull atmosphere impure,
Which you enjoy—which he could not endure.
Slander grows dumb before his searching eye,
And the indignant warmth of his reply.

M. C.

ARUNDEL LIFTON kept his word with Lord Arun, and in about a fortnight from the time of his visit he informed him

that Flora had joined a sisterhood, which was the best thing she could do, Lifton added, and 'twas a pity to disturb her. He further mentioned that she was very comfortable, had everything she wanted, and was well taken care of, and that if Valentine wished her address he could have it.

Lord Arun hardly knew what to do. He did not believe that Flora could be so happy as his cousin made out.

"Shut up in one of those horrid dark places!" he said to himself, "by Jove, it must be awful! Wonder whether I shall see her in the street some day, like some of those women one meets; by Jove, quite too awful to think of; they always give me a shudder. Have their faces bound up in linen, and wear black clothes. Horrid idea! Poor little Flora! Don't believe she'll stand it. Wasn't made for that sort

of thing; it'll kill her. Must see Lifton, by Jove, I must!"

So Lord Arun called on Arundel Lifton, and asked him further particulars.

"Well, I can't say much about it," said Lifton, "but the bankers referred me to a something Johnson, got the address somewhere here, he knows all about it. Oh! here it is. Reverend James Johnson. There's the address; better go and call; it will be a nice amusement for you. He'll give you some ghostly advice before he's done with you, which will do you good, for you know what a sinner you are, Val. He'll have you on your knees at confession before long, and then he'll be persuading you to give something to the Church for the good of your soul."

"I ain't quite such a fool as you think me, Arundel."

"Well, I think you're a fool to go run-

ning after a woman when she's done the best thing she can for herself, and got out of the way. Why not leave her alone?"

"You know, Arundel, you have done more than anyone to drive her to this, 'pon honour, you have." said Valentine, with warmth.

"And a very good thing to have driven her to," said Lifton. "Didn't know she had so much sense."

"Arundel, I consider you are in honour bound to look after her now. Don't you see she wouldn't have done it if she weren't miserable."

"Talk of honour with a creature of that sort? What does she know of honour?"

"That's your fault," said Valentine, in a rage.

"Well, look here, Val, don't get so confoundedly abusive. I hate scenes. Go and

see your parson, and then come and tell me what he advises, and we'll see about it."

"Won't you come with me?"

"That's likely, Val. If you like going about the world inquiring after women with damaged reputations, I don't. I'm not going to have my name mixed up in it."

So Lord Arun went to call on Mr. Johnson. Now Valentine was one of those unselfish creatures that always forget themselves when interested in others, and it never occurred to him that Mr. Johnson would have any suspicion of him. He was quite free from blame, and his behaviour to Flora had always been perfectly honourable, so he saw nothing to fear. He was always nervous with strangers, and when nervous found it difficult to put his sentences together properly.

So he did not favourably impress Mr. Johnson when he went in. He was short-

sighted, and when he was talking to anyone, generally put up an eyeglass to one eye, and so screwed up the other that it gave him rather a comical expression. He was considered by many people to be good-looking, but the simplicity of character which made him so loveable to some, made him ridiculous to others. He was tall and unformed, but unmistakeably a gentleman.

"What can I have the pleasure of doing for you?" said Mr. Johnson, who was a man of particularly severe appearance, though he could be tender when he liked. On this occasion he appeared to be very severe.

"Really," said Valentine, rising and putting up the eyeglass, "I came, don't you see, to inquire about a lady of my acquaintance."

Mr. Johnson looked mystified.

"Yes?" he said.

Valentine found it difficult to get on.

"And to know if she was happy, don't you know?" he jerked out nervously.

"I don't quite understand you," said Mr. Johnson. "Have you mistaken the house?"

"'Pon honour, I don't know," said Valentine, rather relieved at the idea that he might have done so, and that the real Mr. Johnson might be somebody less awful. "Johnson. Reverend Something Johnson," said Valentine, pulling out the address from his waistcoat pocket.

"Johnson is my name," said the Rector.

"Well, don't you see, I was interested in this lady."

"May I ask her name?"

"Oh! certainly. Flora—Flora—dear me!" and he began to stammer, and look very red.

"You don't seem to know her name," said the Rector, evidently thinking it would

do the young man good to be severe with him.

"Well, really now, 'pon honour, can't say I do. Very awkward, by Jove! deuced awkward! Used to call herself Trevor, don't you see."

"I don't understand you, sir," said the Rector. He really had begun to understand the situation, but he imagined Lord Arun was some bad, thoughtless fellow, who had helped to ruin Flora, so he took no pity on him.

"By Jove! didn't think of this difficulty," Valentine dropped his eyeglass, and stared at the carpet, and then put it up again, and looked in the Rector's face for help, but saw none there.

"Awkward thing, don't you see—deuced awkward! Wasn't noticed in society, so went under a false name, poor thing! Was divorced, don't you know."

"Do I understand that this unfortunate lady you mention is in any way connected with me?"

"Yes; gone to a what-d'ye-call-it, don't you see. Shut up, wear black clothes, and that sort of thing."

"You mean she has joined the sisterhood?"

"Yes, that's it; nunnery, you know—sort of thing old Newdegate pitches into."

Mr. Johnson looked very much shocked.

"I think, sir," he said, "you might, in my presence, speak a little more reverently, and make less allusion to the heathen gods."

"Heathen gods! Yes, by Jove! devilish bad habit! Beg pardon."

"Then I understand you have come to inquire after a lady who has joined our sisterhood?"

"That's it," said Val, saying to himself,

"Old buffer might have found it out before, if he wasn't so thick!"

"May I ask in what relation you stand to the lady, that you come to inquire for her?"

"Well, I'm not exactly a relation, don't you see, but my cousin, you know, married her. Let me see—I can't quite make it out either; but, don't you see, that's how I came to know her."

"Then you really are no relation."

"I can't say that I am."

"Then I do not see how you can be interested in a lady who has voluntarily retired from the world, and has expressed no wish to see any of her friends. You seem to know something of her life, and, therefore, I am sure you will agree with me that it would be undesirable for her to see any of her former—" the Rector hesitated for a word. He would have preferred one which

would convey his real meaning to Valentine, and plainly include Valentine as one of Flora's lovers; but he found such a word difficult, and said "associates." Valentine did not see his meaning.

"'Pon honour, you know, I'm really interested in the poor girl, and would do anything in the world for her."

The Rector began to be puzzled. The simplicity of Valentine's character dawned on him.

"May I be curious enough to ask your name?" said the Rector.

"Oh, certainly, Arun, you know, Lord Arun." He searched in his pocket for a card. "Park Lane, you know. Glad to see you any time, and know what I can do for the poor creature."

The Rector began almost to admire the frank simplicity of the man.

"Then I understand that your object is

simply to assist this lady in any way you can."

"Yes, don't you see, I want to know all about it; afraid she isn't happy shut up there in the black clothes."

The Rector smiled at Lord Arun's way of putting it, and assured him that all the sisters were quite happy. "But," he added, "this lady is, unfortunately, very ill."

"Flora very ill! by Jove, what can I do?"

"Everything is done for her that can be done."

"But shouldn't she travel, she always liked change so much."

"I fear she is past travel."

"Flora past travel. Good heavens, and I have brought her to this!"

The Rector looked severe.

"If you have any sin on your soul, my Lord," he said, "had you not better unburden yourself."

"No, 'pon honour, don't you see, I mean it was through me she went there."

"But surely you have done something to make her take the step."

"No, I only asked her to marry me, you know, and she wouldn't; most honourable of her, you see, because I didn't know then. Would do anything for her now, poor girl. Hadn't I better see her? Where's the place?"

"I really think, my Lord, if you will be advised by me, it will be a pity for you to see her, she gets very excitable, and they have to keep her quiet."

"Fancy poor Flora being kept quiet," said Valentine, half to himself. Then turning to Mr. Johnson, he said, "May I send a little note to her, asking if she would like to see me?"

"There can be no objection, that I see," said Mr. Johnson. "I hardly imagine she will."

"But if she does, I may go?"

"Certainly, my Lord, there's no rule against it."

"Then I will let you have the note, Mr. Johnson, as soon as possible, and you will quickly let me have the answer."

"Certainly."

"And, you know, Mr. Johnson," said Valentine nervously, thinking clergymen always wanted money for church, or schools, or something, "don't you see, I shall be very glad to help, you know, restoring church, or anything of that kind."

"Oh! thank you!" said the Rector, smiling, "we've a good modern church, which does not want any restoration, but a parish priest can always find plenty of use for money. The schools attached to the home are a great expense."

"Glad to hear it," said Valentine. He meant he was glad of the chance of giving a

subscription. "I'll send a cheque with the note. Good morning, sir, good morning, I'm much obliged to you," and Lord Arun, dropped his eye-glass, and walked quickly out.

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. TEMPLE'S VISITOR.

Could we but sketch, with the pen of true genius, the model Rector of an English parish, what a grand picture he would be on the canvas! Vandyck should paint him. The man who, with a clear view of the high central truth, has a deep sympathy with humanity in its worse troubles; who turns undazzled from the Great White Throne and carries its light into wretched hovels and into the minds of wretched men; who strives to interpret the thought of God by the work of what we call nature; who deems no science useless, no creature soulless—that is the true parson.

A Fight with Fortune.

ABOUT a week after Lord Arun's visit to Mr. Johnson a note came to him from the Rector informing him that there was no prospect of Flora's recovery, and

that she would be pleased to see him before she died.

Lord Arun, who never could look upon Flora as sinning, but only sinned against, felt sincerely sorry. He imagined that it was his fault that Flora had shut herself up, and he could not forgive himself. He went to his cousin to talk the matter over and see what could be done.

"Poor little wretch, it's the best thing that can happen to her. She'd have been wretched if she had outlived the admiration of the men. She cared for nothing else, and in a few more years she would have been hideous," said Arundel Lifton.

"How unfeeling you are!" said Valentine. "Now she is dying you might have some pity on her. You must go down with me, you know."

"Really, Valentine, you are too ridiculous. What good can we do by going to see the

poor wretch in a dying state, looking a horrid sight, with none of her paint and hair-dye on; ugh! awful idea! I'd rather not, Val."

"By Jove! Arundel, you must be a fiend to talk in that way, after ruining that poor girl." Valentine spoke fiercely.

"Now, Val, for God's sake don't let us have any more scenes about this wretched business. I can't stand a scene. Anything for a quiet life. If you want company on the way, say so, and I'll come. Where is the place?"

Valentine told him.

"Well, then, look here, we'll drive down, and put up at the inn in the town. It's a decent kind of place, as a coach runs there in the summer. I've sometimes tooled it down. And I daresay they've plenty of accommodation just now when the coaches are not on the road. Couldn't stand it

more than one night there, you know. I suppose you're not in a hurry."

"In a hurry! Why, don't you see, she might die while you're waiting."

"Well, this is Saturday, we can't go to-night, we'll start to-morrow, and then you can go over to see her on Monday morning, and we'll start back again early in the afternoon."

"But you'll go to see her too, Arundel."

"Shall I? We'll see about that."

"But I mean you to go."

"Indeed."

Arundel Lifton hated a scene, and few people ever dared to get angry with him. Valentine had gone further than anyone, and had in some measure come to be able to manage his cousin. Whether the simplicity of his character made him quite unconscious of the depths of villainy of which his cousin was capable, and so prevented

him from having the same fear of him that other people had, or whether Lifton was himself puzzled with Valentine's simplicity, and had unconsciously allowed him to manage him, it is impossible to say; one thing is certain, that no one except Valentine ever dared to order Arundel Lifton to do anything.

Perhaps in the wicked, cold, cruel man there had grown up a love for the simple, awkward, gentle boy—the boy who was as incapable of doing anything dishonourable as he was of putting a sentence together properly.

So on Sunday afternoon Arundel Lifton and Lord Arun are being carried swiftly southward out of London. On that same day Frank Forncett received the letter from Leonora which he showed to the Frowdes.

Jack, on that Sunday afternoon, was at home, wondering whether Frank Forncett

would manage Mr. Temple. And poor little Kate sat in a big, dull room in Old Burlington Street, with her eyes on a book, and her thoughts some miles away.

On Monday morning Mr. Temple had a very early visitor. Mr. Johnson was announced.

"I come on an awkward mission," said the Rector, "but I am sure you will understand that a clergyman has often strange duties to perform."

"I am aware of it," said Mr. Temple.

He began to wonder how many more clergymen were coming to him on awkward missions. "But this man is at least a gentleman," he said to himself.

"I am sure," said the Rector, "you will excuse me if I am compelled to mention a painful circumstance connected with your family—I mean your divorce."

"Oh, certainly," said Mr. Temple—"if it is necessary for you to mention it."

"It is, unfortunately. The lady to whom you were married is ill."

"Indeed! I hope she is well cared for?"

"Yes, everything has been done; but there seems little hope of her recovery. I fear she is fast dying."

Mr. Temple was a man unaccustomed to show any emotion even to those he loved. The same power which had made him so useful a diplomatist in his earlier years, enabled him to keep the muscles of his face unmoved or the tone of his voice unaltered during any period of excitement. But now the colour left his face. It is difficult to say what feeling passed through his mind that should so affect him outwardly. It could not be grief. Was it joy at the

prospect of an immediate end to the years of disgrace that he and Kate had suffered? At least, he had suffered for himself and the child too, and now she was beginning to suffer.

He found it difficult to speak for a moment. His heart had seemed to be still for a time, and then it began to thump fiercely. When he spoke it sounded to him as if his voice came from another part of the room.

"Where is she?" he said.

The Rector explained where she was, and why she had gone there. Mr. Temple's face softened as he heard of her repentance.

"Can I do anything for her?" he said.

"Yes; you can grant her dying request—and I am sure you will."

"What is it?"

"She wishes to see her child——"

"It is impossible."

"But think for one moment—would you refuse so small a favour to a dying woman?"

"It is impossible. I could not bear the thought of it;" and Mr. Temple added something in an undertone, as if to himself, in which the Rector caught the word "contamination."

"The best of us are but great sinners in the sight of God, so how shall we judge one another? Christ, who was without sin, was merciful; how, then, can we refuse to be merciful to one another? I pray you, sir, consider what you are doing in refusing the request of a poor repentant sinner."

"But think of my child—what effect it may have on her. It will be an unpleasant remembrance for her whole life."

"It may be unpleasant at first, but surely it will be pleasant after. It is good and

wholesome for the young to know of trouble, and to have stern lessons in their youth; it fits them for life."

Mr. Temple hardly agreed with this theory of the Rector's. He considered that, life being open to so much trouble, youth should be made as pleasant a period as possible, and he had endeavoured to keep from Kate as much as possible the knowledge of evil. He had until lately succeeded very well, but Kate's little love-troubles had come, and she had insisted on learning from Leonora all about her mother, and was beginning to look at life very seriously indeed.

William Temple did not want his daughter to look seriously at life for a long time to come. He liked to have the fresh, happy, joyous girl always about with him, chattering pretty nonsense to him, and pretty sense too sometimes, for she was

very sensible. The great trouble of his life seemed to be always with him, and it made him a sad and silent man. But this little daughter could charm away his sadness. He liked to have her always with him, and he liked her to be always the same happy careless Kate, unconscious of trouble or care. He had seen the change coming over her lately, and it vexed him. Since she had so changed, she had taken more pains to please her father. Experience of trouble generally makes good people better—that is, it makes them more unselfish, and more thoughtful of everyone. Mr. Temple knew this well enough, and understood why the child seemed more anxious to please him. But it was just what he did not want. It was the unconscious happiness of the child that did him so much good. It seemed to be just the antidote to his complaint—that

incurable complaint of sadness caused by a trouble that cannot be overcome.

A weight had come on his spirits since Kate had learnt what trouble was. She was no longer the bright, beautiful little spirit that had tripped along gaily by his side, surrounding him with an atmosphere of light, so that his cares seemed far off in a mist; but she was now the thoughtful little woman that could share his sadness and sympathise with him.

Therefore, when Mr. Johnson proposed that she should see her mother, Mr. Temple was in no mood to accede to the proposal. He was already smarting under the effects of Kate's new knowledge, and he was determined to save her any further trouble if he could. But Mr. Johnson's arguments were strong. He felt that it would be cruel to refuse.

"Do you think she would be contented

if she saw me, and not my daughter?" he said.

"I think not. She has some jewels which she tells me you gave her, and she wishes to place them in her daughter's hands."

Mr. Temple shuddered. He would rather not see the jewels again, and he hated to hear Kate spoken of as *her* daughter.

"Could not my daughter be excused on account of her health? She is not well, and this meeting may have a serious effect on her."

"I think, under such painful circumstances, great sacrifices might be made," said the Rector reproachfully. "Great though the sins of this woman have been, she may have passed through much suffering. She has shown by her life lately that she is truly repentant. I think we should do what we can to ease her mind before she passes out of this world."

"Well, I must consent," said Mr. Temple. "Did she express any wish to see me?"

"She did not say she would rather not see you, but she seemed a little frightened when it was mentioned."

Mr. Temple did not like to hear this. He felt it was such a terrible reproach. He had so often blamed himself for not better understanding Flora in the early years. She had the same bright happy temper as Kate, but had not been brought up with the same loving care. She was a mere girl when Temple married her, and she required a husband who would be a father and husband too. The young diplomatist was then full of high hopes and ambitions. He meant to make a name and a position, and he looked upon his wife as a beautiful woman, who would share that position gracefully. He forgot that she was a mere child, who wanted to be petted and caressed. It took

him a long time to realize the mistake he made; indeed he never fully realized it till he saw his little Kate growing up the same bright, beautiful creature. And then he found out that there is some other knowledge required in the world besides that of diplomacy—namely, a knowledge of human nature.

"She will not object to seeing me, I suppose. I should like to accompany my daughter."

"I should think she would not. I am sure you will feel that, however she has sinned against you, you can grant her forgiveness. She will soon be in other hands than ours, when, let us hope, she will find mercy. We now, as sinners ourselves, can do nothing but forgive."

The Rector evidently judged Mr. Temple to be a severe man, and used such arguments as he thought would touch him. But

the arguments were scarcely necessary. Mr. Temple was already touched. He was both severe and tender-hearted. The severity belonged to him naturally. The tenderness had grown on him in later years. The tender point was touched when the Rector mentioned that Flora was frightened of him. His humanity came to the front, and the Rector's Christianity was unnecessary. But perhaps humanity is Christianity, or Christianity humanity. Mere words will not always express an idea. When Christ gave to his few followers those beautiful precepts which were to teach men how to live, he scarcely supposed that there were not many who had been on the earth before him that had lived according to those precepts; that is to say, that there were Christians before Christ came: so now there are some who, not having heard of Christ, yet practise the humanity and kindness that Christ taught.

But such a sentiment as this would shock Mr. Johnson, who not only had much humanity in him, but professed every doctrine of the Church.

"When shall we go?" said Mr. Temple.

"I think no time should be lost," said the Rector.

"Is it easy of access?"

"Exceedingly: there are trains frequently."

"Is there an inn in the place?"

"A very good one in the town. The Home is about two miles from the town."

"Had we better go to-day?"

"It would be kind in you to do so. I don't think she can last much longer."

Mr. Temple looked at his watch, and rang the bell for a time-table.

"You have," said the Rector, "a sister living with you, I understand."

"I have," said Mr. Temple.

"The poor dying creature said she should like to ask her forgiveness."

"I am sure my sister will grant it," said Mr. Temple, trying to speak in his usual tone. "She will, I daresay, not object to come with us. I will ask her."

"We must now have only pity for her," said Mr. Johnson, rising, still afraid, from Mr. Temple's manner, that he was severe.

They shook hands, and the Rector left, Mr. Temple promising him that he would go by the earliest train he could conveniently get.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

> Hearts are not flint, and flints are rent;
> Hearts are not steel, and steel is bent.
>
> SCOTT.

IT was considered advisable by Leonora, when her brother consulted her, not to tell Kate of the visit she was about to make.

Kate, still in distress about Jack, for Mrs. Frowde's letter was at present in the post-office, could only connect the sudden movement with her own trouble, and wondered whether she was being taken out of Jack's way. But she knew she must not vex her father by appearing unwilling to go, so she

made the best of it, and tried to chat as gaily as usual while they travelled. At the station for which they were bound, they engaged a fly to take them to the inn. When they arrived at the inn, they found there was no private sitting-room they could have.

"There are two gentlemen who have one," said the landlady, "but I think they're going away this afternoon. I'll send and ask. Maybe, they won't mind giving up the room to the ladies, and going in the coffee-room, if they stay."

A servant went up to the room in question. There was Arundel Lifton stretched out on the sofa, looking very unlike moving, and Lord Arun standing on the hearth-rug looking impatient.

The servant delivered his message.

"Dash'd if I'm going to stir," said Lifton. "Look here, Val, I'm done up; I've got a

regular fit of blue devils. Can't you put off that errand of yours till to-morrow, like a sensible fellow, and just stay here with me to-night? There's no other fellow I care to have about me."

"No," said Valentine, very decisively. "She trusted me to do it, and I will. I shall get off by train at once. You can stay or not, as you like, but you might give up your room to these ladies."

"That I certainly shall not. You know I can't stand anyone about me when I have these fits—no, I'm not going to give up this room to-day," he said, turning to the waiter.

"Very well, sir."

But Valentine was far too chivalrous to allow ladies to be wanting a room which he was occupying, so he thought he would go down and find out who the ladies were and see what could be done.

He followed the waiter, and went to speak to the landlady.

"These ladies," said the landlady apologetically, "want a room, my lord, and I thought you were perhaps going away today."

"Yes, I am," said Valentine. He put up his eye-glass, as was his custom when about to speak to anyone, and turned round to explain to the ladies that a friend was occupying his room, but would doubtless give it up, when he suddenly recognised the Temples.

"Really, now," he said, shaking hands, "I am, don't you see, quite startled. So very odd too, you know, was just going to look for you. 'Pon honour, I'm glad to see you."

Mr. Temple, who had seen little of Lord Arun on the night he was at Forncett's

house, and did not know his peculiarities, was somewhat astonished. And he wondered why he should be looking for him. Mr. Johnson, when he told the history of Flora's repentance, did not mention Lord Arun's name, from motives of delicacy, thinking it might somewhat damage the young nobleman's character, as the world would hardly believe he had acted from entirely disinterested motives.

"I'm much obliged to you," said Mr. Temple, hardly knowing what was really the best thing to say to so enthusiastic a greeting from a man who was almost a stranger.

"By Jove! you know, I was just going to rush off to find you—meant to see you to-night somehow, you know."

Mr. Temple looked more mystified than ever.

"May I ask what your business was with me?"

"Why, don't you see I've just been to see——" but here a great difficulty came in the way. Lord Arun did not know what to call Flora. "Mrs. Temple" wouldn't do, he thought. "By Jove!" he said to himself, "what is her name?" He pulled his eye-glass out of his eye and put it back again, to get inspiration how to proceed. "Don't you see," he said, coming back to his inevitable phrase, "I've just been over to—let me see, where is it—what's the name of that place we had the cab for this morning, Mrs. Price?"

Mrs. Price was the landlady.

"'The Home,' my lord."

"Ah, yes; don't you see, I've been to the Home; but—dear me, I'm keeping the ladies standing; where can I offer you a seat, dear me!"

"Won't you show them up to your room, my lord?" said Mrs. Price.

"Yes, of course—of course—this way." Now Lord Arun was so nervous and confused, first at meeting the Temples and then at the difficulty about Flora's name, that he entirely forgot for the moment the relationship between his cousin and Leonora.

Kate wondered what it could all mean, and, not knowing the sadness behind it, was laughing at Valentine taking his long legs and body nervously up the stairs two steps at a time, talking disconnectedly all the way.

"What a funny man he is!" she whispered to Leonora, as her father followed Valentine in.

Arundel Lifton had thrown himself back on the sofa and closed his eyes. He had an unusually severe fit of what he called blue devils coming on.

Valentine walked into the room, followed

by Mr. Temple, who saw the figure on the sofa, but did not recognise for the moment who it was. Leonora and Kate followed.

Lifton did not open his eyes, but hearing Val's quick, nervous step, which was easily recognisable, he said—

"Curse you, Val! for taking me to see that poor little wretch this morning. You seem to take a delight in bringing me face to face with my old sins. Ugh! I can't get it out of my head," and he put his hands over his eyes and pressed them down as if he would press out some vision that was haunting him.

Now when once Lifton began to speak Val became conscious of the horrible position in which he had placed everybody.

"Oh! really—dear me, what can I do?" he said, taking up his eye-glass as if to be ready for anything, and walking towards

the door and back again, "'Pon honour, this is awkward."

"What's awkward?" said Lifton, looking up.

For a moment he looked as if he could not realise what he saw. He sat straight up on the sofa.

If it had been Mr. Temple only he would probably have been cool enough. He had come face to face with him on two or three occasions since he had done him the great wrong; but Arundel Lifton was a cold, cruel man, and he could face Mr. Temple apparently unmoved.

But Leonora he had never met in all those years. He had seen her, had often, indeed, gone out of his way to look at her, though he would never have admitted it to anybody; but they never accidentally met.

When these terrible fits came on him there was always one face haunting him,

and that face was Leonora's. When he sat upright on the sofa and saw her, he stared at her earnestly for a minute.

In the meantime Mr. Temple had intimated to Valentine that they had better leave the room.

Val was opening the door and they were just leaving the room when Lifton cried out piteously, and in an almost unearthly voice,

"Leonora!"

Mr. Temple pushed Kate and Leonora hurriedly out and closed the door.

The excitement of the morning had already weakened Leonora's nerves. The scene which had just occurred, although, perhaps, it only lasted a few seconds, was too much for her, and she staggered forward, catching hold of the balustrade.

William Temple caught hold of her, and with Valentine's assistance carried her into the nearest bedroom, which happened to be Lifton's.

Val rushed about uttering his disconnected scraps of talk, mixing up blame of himself and pity for Leonora into a regular jumble. Kate was in great distress. She could not make out what was the matter. She began to think the world was full of mystery. The man in the next room had frightened her too; she thought he must be a madman, for he looked so strange, and his shout of "Leonora" was still ringing in her ears. She looked round nervously at the door as if she thought he might come in, and her face was so white that her father was afraid she also would faint.

"Why, my little Kate, how frightened you look," said Mr. Temple, putting on a cheerful tone, "there's nothing particular the matter. Mamma's a little bit tired, and the man in that room frightened her. Rub her hands. She'll soon be better."

"Who is he, papa, is he a madman?"

"He looks like it, child."

"Will he follow us, do you think? I'm so frightened of him."

"No, child, you're safe here."

Although Leonora recovered consciousness soon, she looked so ill that her brother determined she should not go to the Home that day, whatever happened. The room occupied by Lifton and Lord Arun was placed at their disposal, but Leonora could not bear to go into it again. So a fire was lighted in her bedroom, and she and Kate, both looking very pale, were placed there.

Mr. Temple found out from Valentine that Flora was really very bad, and could hardly speak, and would probably not live many hours; but he did not convey this information to Leonora, as he knew she would be anxious to go and see her, and she was not in a fit state to go. She went to bed early, hoping that a long night's rest would

restore her, and Kate, who could not get over her terror of "the madman," as she called him, slept in Leonora's room. Valentine tried to persuade Lifton to leave the house, but he was not to be persuaded. He had but one idea in his mind, he was in the same house with Leonora, and he would never leave it while she was there. Wishing to be alone, or at least to have no company but Val's, he retired to his bedroom. There he found a handkerchief, dropped in the confusion when Leonora fainted. He looked at the mark. It was simply "Leonora." He sat down clasping the handkerchief tightly between his fingers.

He sat quite motionless for a long time, as he always did when these fits came on him. Then Valentine appeared, and begged him to have some dinner, but he refused.

"Now, Arundel, you know, don't be a fool! Don't you see, it was an awkward

thing. I didn't mean it. Quite a mistake, 'pon honour. Do have some dinner."

"Don't bother, Val! Don't you see, you young idiot, that I'm very glad you *did* make the mistake. Why, I've spoken to her once again!" he exclaimed fiercely, starting from his seat. "I've called her by her name. Here's her handkerchief. See her name. I love her madly, passionately. I would give every penny I have in the world to have her once more—every bit of that cursed money which has made a devil of me. You young fools don't know what it is to love—to have a burning, inextinguishable love. I tell you, my love for that woman will kill me. It is killing me!"

His face turned white as he said this, and he lost the mad power which had seemed to possess him for a few moments.

"Sit down, Arundel, and be quiet. You're making yourself ill."

"It's best to leave me alone, boy. I am glad to see you; but don't bother me to eat anything, or to move. I shall be better to-morrow."

Lord Arun went to see him again several times before he went to bed, but he found him always in the same mood.

"Good night, Arundel," he said, when he saw him for the last time. "I hope, you know, that you'll be yourself in the morning. I'll come and look after you when I turn out."

"Good night, my boy. You're a dear, good fellow, Val. God bless you!"

Val walked away to his room, thinking his cousin was in a funny mood. He had before experienced what these fits were, but he had never known Arundel affectionate to him, or heard him acknowledge that he loved anyone. Val could not make it out. He puzzled over it, and came to the con-

clusion that Arundel was not half such a bad fellow as he made himself out to be. It did not occur to him that his own gentleness had perhaps awoke a sense of goodness in the hard man. When he shut the door on his cousin, Arundel said to himself—

"Now it's too late, I'm beginning to find out that there's something worth more than gold in the world. That boy is happy, because he has real goodness in him. He'd be happy wherever he was, even if he had to work for his living. I've always tried to buy my happiness, and I have bought it too —sometimes; but I can't buy her love. Fool that I am! Why don't I crush the love out of me? Stamp it out!" and he tried to stamp the floor, but his legs seemed feeble. "I have money to gratify every want, and yet I must endure this misery. Why won't money give me power to crush it out?" He looked again at the name on

the handkerchief. "No," he thought, "I don't want to crush it out!" He kissed the name on the handkerchief. "What a fool!" he began again fiercely. "Fancy Arundel Lifton, who has been worshipped by a dozen women, making such a fool of himself. Why, I could make almost any woman love me, and some of the poor brutes loved me all the better for my cruelty to them. Women are like dogs, you must keep them under your thumb, and they love you all the better for it. It was capital sport. Happiness! I've bought plenty of happiness in my time." And he gave one of his fiendish laughs. "Why don't I do it now? Why do I sit here craving for the love of one woman, when I can have the love of a dozen? Bah! what do I care for the little dog-like brutes, who follow you faithfully, and lick your hand when you kick them? or for the painted butterflies who only want money

spent on them. It is the one woman I want —the grand, noble woman, fit to be the companion of a man. But I'm not a man, I'm a fiend! I'll crush the devil out of me. I'll be a man. Leonora, Leonora, for your sake I'll commence a new life. I'll——"

He tried to shape out some different course of life, but he felt an inability to think coming over him. He found he could not breathe easily, and a stifling sensation came into his throat. He made an effort to think what it was he wanted to do, but could not. He had an instinct to get up and go to his dressing-case for brandy, for he was accustomed to a feeling of faintness occasionally, especially during his fits; but he found he could not move. His hands were locked in one another, holding the handkerchief. He put his head back in the large low chair, and remained perfectly motionless. Anyone seeing Arundel Lifton's

face at that time would have said that the expression was changed. Many of the lines and marks were still there, for fifty years of villainy cannot be stamped out of a face in a few moments; but there was some difference easily perceptible—something that made him look a better man.

Arundel Lifton lies perfectly still there in the dead of night, and above him lies the woman he has so madly loved—his wife.

What makes Leonora wake up in the night with a strange shivering feeling, and a presentiment of something wrong? She fancies she heard an odd sound. She listens, but all is silent—so very silent, it seems to her.

CHAPTER XIX.

FORGIVENESS.

Owning her weakness,
Her evil behaviour,
And leaving, with meekness,
Her sins to her Saviour.

HOOD.

ON the evening of Mr. Temple's arrival he had, after seeing Leonora and Kate comfortably settled in their room, driven to the Home to see how Flora was. She was always rather brighter in the evening, so he was able to see her.

The interview could only be a distressing one—regrets on the one side, and forgiveness on the other. Mr. Temple explained to her

what had happened to prevent Leonora and Kate from coming that evening, but he hoped they would be well enough to come the next day. Flora was overcome with grief when she heard this, for she then realized what a sad life Leonora's must have been. She begged that Leonora would not come unless she were quite able, as she felt assured of her forgiveness now.

Mr. Temple stayed a very short time with her, and left her comparatively happy, as she knew that her child and Leonora were so near. In the early morning Mr. Temple went to Leonora's room, and knocked cautiously, lest she should be asleep, but she had been awake a long time, with a strange uneasy sensation.

"You had better not come yet, Leonora," said Mr. Temple. "Let me go first and come back and fetch you. Remain in bed till then."

"Where are you going, papa?" said Kate, "am I to go too?"

Kate had been thinking that all sorts of mysterious things were happening, and she was now not surprised at anything, only she wondered whether it all had anything to do with Jack. Lord Arun puzzled her particularly; he tried to be so attentive to her, and she could not help laughing at him.

"No, Kate," said her father, "you're not coming with me now; take care of mamma. I'm going to see a poor sick person, and when I come back I'll take you and mamma too, if mamma is better."

"Is the ugly man here still, papa?"

"He isn't up yet, nor anybody else. You had better not leave this room till I come back, and then there'll be no fear of meeting him. I shall not be long."

William Temple drove away in the early morning, with a multitude of thoughts run-

ning through his mind. The one great trouble which had taken from him his position in the world, which had damped all his hopes and ambitions, was soon to be removed, but it seemed of little use to him now. He did not care again to make a name in the world; besides, there was his sister, he thought, she must be protected, she had yet her trouble to bear. Then he almost wished that it might be Arundel Lifton that was to be taken instead of poor Flora. Then he thought of his little Kate, and how she had lost all her bright gaiety and was learning only too soon what trouble was.

"How I wish I could save her this interview," he thought; "it can do little good, and will do her incalculable harm. She looks ill enough already. What can have happened with that young Sebright? He's evidently heard about her mother, and is

too proud to join himself to such a family."

Many more thoughts occupied William Temple as he drove, on that cold, grey December morning, to the Home.

When he arrived he was asked into a cold, cheerless room, in which the fire had only that minute been lighted, and a dull dirty smoke was struggling up through the wood and coal. He had to wait some time, for the mother had been up all night, and had gone to freshen herself a little before seeing him.

"I have no good account for you," she said, as she came in.

"I am prepared for whatever you may have to tell me," said Temple.

"She died a few hours ago, quite quietly," said the mother.

There was silence in the room for a minute, except for the crackling sound of the wood burning.

"Will you see her?" said the mother.

"No, no," said Temple, with just a gesture of disgust. "What is the mere covering when the spirit is gone?"

The mother thought him rather hard-hearted. Many people like looking at a corpse, and women, in a house of death, will often consider it as an insult to the dead if a visitor will not go and see the body.

To see the dead body of a stranger is not pleasant, or of a friend or acquaintance, but the body of one that you have loved is the most terrible sight of all. You have known every turn and line in the face, have looked into the eyes, and kissed the lips, have seen it lighted up with fun and laughter, or saddened with trouble and tears; have pressed it to your own, and felt in the very touch of it the love that there is between you.

That face may still look ever so beautiful after death, but you realise that it was not that bit of flesh that you loved, but something else, of which that flesh was only the covering. It is surely better not to look at the dead face of one we have loved.

Disregard of the mere covering of the spirit could not have been better shown than by that phrase of Shakespeare's—

"—Shuffle off this mortal coil."

The word "shuffle" carries such contempt with it. You shuffle out of the covering as you would out of an old garment—something done with and cast aside.

If Mr. Temple had ever loved Flora, he had long since lost that love; but he objected, in any case, to looking at a dead body. So the mother put him down as hard-hearted, and if she had known the first thought that entered his mind after her

announcement, she would have thought even worse of him; for when he heard that poor Flora was dead, he thanked God that Kate need not have the meeting that he dreaded so much. He was full of pity for Flora, but Kate was his one thought and care.

Death seems to cause an oppressive stillness in the house. All the sounds seem different. The clocks seem to tick with an unusual sound, and footsteps and voices seem different. Mr. Temple felt depressed. It was a cold, wretched morning, and he had come out without breakfast; so he thought it best to go back to the inn at once, and he assured the mother that he would either see her or send to her in the course of the day.

CHAPTER XX.

GRAVE AND GAY.

ASTROLOGOS :

You look at life, Prince, through rose-tinted spectacles.

RAFAEL :

And you through drab ones.

ASTROLOGOS :

Not at all, your Excellence—
I have three sets, with a miraculous difference.
These show the Past, with all its wondrous mysteries ;
Rimmed are they with the horn of the rhinoceros :
These show the Future—rim of gold encircles them :
But these, with setting of a very sombre sort,
Mere dusky ebony, my Prince, mere ebony,
Show the strong Present, wheresoever turned they are.

RAFAEL : Go. May I see my true love ?

ASTROLOGOS : Take the spectacles.

RAFAEL : O !

The Comedy of Dreams.

THE day of Flora's death was the day on which Jack and his father had the

interview with Mr. Voyd, and on the afternoon of that day Mr. Forncett and Harry Rivers and Jack left Two Bridges station for town. Jack very reluctantly went with Harry Rivers to Mr. Forncett's hotel, Harry chaffing him very much about being so serious, and saying he only wished he had as much chance of Miss Temple.

When Forncett arrived in Old Burlington Street, he found that the Temples had left the day before, and it was not known when they would return. Mr. Temple had left an order that no letters were to be forwarded until they heard from him.

Therefore Mr. Forncett arrived at his hotel soon after Jack and Harry, and Jack looked the picture of despair when he heard the news.

"It's like my luck," he said, "everything has gone wrong with me lately. She can't even have had my letter. And there's no

knowing how ill she may be. I fear she has had to be removed because of her illness. What can I do?"

"Nothing but wait patiently, you impetuous boy," said Frank. "I'll go up again to-night, to hear if there is any news of them, they will either come back or write, for Mr. Temple would never leave his letters untouched. His correspondence is of importance. So now eat your dinner, for you know you can't live on love."

But it was not love that was spoiling Jack's appetite, it was anxiety. He could do nothing but reproach himself about Kate's illness; he felt sure it was all his fault. He worried himself about it, and he worried Frank and Harry too, and though they both laughed at him, he would not be consoled. Frank knew that if she were seriously ill he should have heard of it, for the bond of friendship—or what they persuaded them-

selves was friendship—between him and Leonora was such that they recorded to one another all the small incidents of their lives.

When two people love one another, whether they be lovers or friends, or both, for the true lover is a true friend, it is astonishing what a lot of pretty little nonsense they will write. The most trivial affairs are interesting to them. They may both pass in the world as serious, clever, and strong-minded people, yet to one another they are mere children, amusing each other with trifles. And how charming it is when the "friend who is as your own soul" has high intellect, and does good work in the world, and is strong in mind and purpose, and yet shows a weak side of character to you only. You feel that you treasure it up as a secret, and love the very weakness.

At least this was how Leonora felt about

Frank Forncett. He passed in the world as a clever, grave philosophic man: yet this grave philosopher could write the prettiest nonsense to Leonora—not love-nonsense—because they were only to be friends. And if *he* was not allowed to send a kiss to Leonora, his bull-dog Foxy might; not that Foxy gave one at all the impression of wanting to send a kiss to a lady; he did not look it a bit; he was a stolid, surly little fellow, with a very determined affection for his master and Ralph, and nobody else. If he had any tender regard for a woman at all, it was for Mary, who would give him a choice little bit of food occasionally, for Foxy was not a vulgar dog who would eat anything.

But Foxy was made very useful in sending his love to Leonora.

Now, Frank Forncett passing in the world as a grave philosopher, not without a spice

of humour though, did not care to acknowledge to Jack that his intimacy with Leonora was such that he was sure to have heard if anything serious had happened. So he could not altogether allay Jack's fears, and Jack was very fidgetty.

After dinner Mr. Forncett went round again to Old Burlington Street, and found that a telegram had arrived, ordering the maid to be sent on that night to the Bedford, at Brighton, with the letters and changes of linen for a couple of days.

Jack, when he heard this, wanted to rush off to Brighton at once; but Frank urged him to be patient till the next morning, when he would telegraph. He thought something unusual might have occurred, and that there would probably be a letter for him at Copse Hill the next morning, as they hardly expected him in town so early in the week, and his letter announcing his

intention to come on Tuesday had not, of course, reached them, in consequence of the awkward postal arrangements on Sundays at Copse Hill.

Jack wished he might have his own way and rush down to Brighton that night, though, as he reflected, he would arrive too late to be able to call, and after all he could hardly dare to call till Mr. Forncett had seen them. So he tried to get through another night as well as he could, Frank reminding him that if he neither ate nor slept he would lose his beauty, and be a miserable object to present to his lady-love.

But all Frank's fun could not relieve Jack's anxiety. He got only snatches of sleep all night, and kept dreaming he was pursuing Kate in wild places, and that just as he put out his hand to catch her, she slipped away from him and became invisible. And she seemed to have a wild un-

earthly look about her, with a very white face, and this white face kept haunting Jack after he woke, so that he felt certain she was very ill.

Jack was up early, and had been wandering about in the streets when his companions came down to breakfast. He wanted to know whether Frank had sent out the telegram.

"Good gracious, boy," said Frank, "why, they won't be up yet. People don't get up early these dark December mornings, unless they're very much in love, like some one I know. We'll have some breakfast first, and then we'll telegraph."

About an hour after breakfast, when Jack's anxiety and impatience were at their height, a telegram came in answer to Frank's telling him that Mr. Temple would be thankful if he would come down to them at once if convenient, and he would be pleased to see Mr. Sebright.

"There, Jack," said Frank. "That's more than I expected. Are you happy now? That's as good as 'yes' from Mr. Temple. You may consider your troubles at an end."

"You lucky boy!" said the envious Harry, who thought he had never seen a woman so lovely as Kate.

Jack's face so completely altered after this news that, notwithstanding his anxiety and loss of sleep and appetite, he looked as handsome as ever.

He was full of spirits as they travelled, only the train would not go fast enough for him, and Frank envied him in his happiness. If Frank had only read a letter that was lying at his house that morning, how his thoughts would have changed! He felt almost sad as he saw the boy's happiness, and thought how such joy had always been denied to him, and was likely to be. The

more joyous Jack became the sadder Frank felt.

When they reached Brighton, Jack, of course, wanted to get out of the train long before it had stopped, and had to be held down by Frank.

When they reached the hotel they were shown into a room by themselves, and presently the waiter returned to say would Mr. Forncett come alone to speak to Mr. Temple.

Jack's face fell a little at this. He wondered whether all was quite right. But he had such faith in what Forncett could do for him. He waited a long time—ages, it seemed to him; but he took out his watch every two minutes, and the time seemed to go so slowly.

"I suppose he's telling him all about it," thought Jack.

But Mr. Forncett was not doing so by

any means. He had something else to think of by this time, and had for the moment positively forgotten poor Jack.

Jack waited yet. Why were they so long? He took up a newspaper, and mechanically read something; then he took up another, and mechanically read something else, and jumbled the two things together in his mind. Then he walked round the room, looking at the prints on the wall. There was one of the *Black Brunswicker*.

"Confound it all!" he thought, wishing he had Kate in the same position as the lady was in the picture. It seemed so tantalizing to be so near her, and yet not be able to see her. "There is surely some difficulty, or he could not be so long," thought Jack.

At last the door opened, and Jack looked eagerly to see who came. It was Mr. Temple. His face was so grave that Jack's

hopes immediately went down to zero.

"How do you do, Mr. Sebright?" he said solemnly.

"Quite well, thank you," faltered Jack, looking very pale.

"I am sorry," said Mr. Temple, "to be unable to entertain you,"—Jack thought the very worst had come, and his heart seemed almost to stop beating—"but I must go away to-day on some urgent affairs, and hope to be with you to-morrow." Jack's face brightened a little. "In the meantime," continued Mr. Temple, "will you and Mr. Forncett remain here as my guests?—and I am sure I can leave the ladies in your care. Mr. Forncett will acquaint you with the cause of my sudden departure. I have no time to make any further explanation. I must apologise for keeping you waiting so long."

"Oh, don't mention it!" said Jack. "'Twas nothing."

Jack did not think it was nothing a few minutes ago. His face had so wonderfully changed during the last few moments that Mr. Temple must have noticed it.

It all seemed very strange to Jack. He could not make it out. All he knew was that he was left in charge of Kate. Delicious idea! He did not know quite how he got out of that room and into another, where he found Kate, and where also he found Leonora and Frank; only he was quite unconscious of their presence for some moments, having eyes for nothing but the one object which was all the world to him.

CHAPTER XXI.

AT COPSE HILL AGAIN.

Void is the man of what befits a gentleman,
Void of the English easy, humorous courtesy,
Void of the pure contempt for dull rascality,
Void utterly of Christ's unmeasured kindliness,
Void of high feeling, and a trifle viperous.

The Comedy of Dreams.

A WEEK after the date mentioned in the last chapter, our friends are all at Copse Hill again; they are all congregated at Manly Frowde's, for he seems to them to be a sort of centre amongst them, a sun round which they, as planets, travel. He can enter into their joy and sympathise with their grief, and teach them a philosophy which

will help them to bear trouble well and use pleasure wisely. There is something in the man which draws everyone to him—Mr. Voyd called it "fascination." Of course it is not a fascination, but it is difficult to find a proper word.

There were Kate and Jack intensely happy, and somehow they felt that they should like to tell Mr. Frowde how happy they were. They loved one another very much, and almost forgot everyone else in their happiness, but they both loved Mr. Frowde too. There were others who had joys—subdued joys, mixed with sorrows, and they wanted to tell Mr. Frowde all about it.

So Manly Frowde has plenty to hear.

Jack had so much to say, and Kate would keep interrupting him, and Manly Frowde was just like a big boy listening to them and laughing at all their adventures.

"And oh! you'll never forgive me," said Kate, giving Manly Frowde a kiss, "for sending those dear verses of yours to the wash. It looked as if I didn't care for them a bit, you know, and I did; and I know you'll never write me any more, because you think I don't value them."

"Won't I?" said Manly Frowde. "You shall have some on white satin on your wedding-day, and you shall have plenty more on every occasion, child. You need not trouble to keep them, they are of no value, and there are more where those came from."

Then Frank Forncett had so much to say.

"You know, Frowde, it seems wrong to be so happy when one's happiness is gained through another's death, especially as the poor fellow seems really to have loved her. He has left her everything, except a small part of his estate which he had not the

power to will away from the family, and he was actually found dead holding a handkerchief marked with her name. They got her out of the house without telling her about it till she was away. Kate was not told about her mother for some days. Young Lord Arun behaved in the noblest way. He managed everything for Temple, and really showed such good sense, and poor Lifton seems to have spoken very kindly to him before he died. Temple did not wish him to trouble himself about Flora, because he thought Valentine's name might get mixed up unpleasantly with hers; but the boy did not seem to mind that, and would attend to everything. I really honour him. I had no idea he had such sense."

"Another ten years will, I daresay, make a fine fellow of him," said Frowde.

"Leonora and Mr. Temple were also at the Cottage, and Lord Arun, who was Frank

Forncett's visitor. Lord Arun was going about from one to the other with his eye-glass and his disconnected sentences. He had taken to Mrs. Frowde.

"So glad to meet your husband," he said. "Awfully clever fellow, you know. Read his verses. They're so jolly, don't you see, don't bore a fellow. Used to keep one of his novels by my bedside, and have a look at it when I couldn't go to sleep."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Frowde, "you mean it sent you to sleep."

"No, don't mean that, you know, but he says such clever things, and teaches a fellow how to live, don't you see?—I mean, you know, he makes you try to be good."

Mrs. Frowde was delighted with this praise of her husband; she was ever ready to listen to anyone who loved or admired Manly Frowde. She decided that Lord Arun must be a good fellow notwith-

standing his odd way of expressing himself.

Then Lord Arun chatted with the Miss Selfes, and Claudia quite "brought him out," as she expressed it.

Diana Selfe, of course, chaffed Jack and Kate very much, and pictured Jack as a bishop, and Kate as a bishopess.

Mrs. Frowde said that Jack must certainly be the Vicar of Copse Hill.

"And Mr. Frowde must write my sermons," said Jack, laughing.

"But Frowde already sermonizes to a much larger congregation than our little church will hold," said Frank Forncett.

"I shall be frightened to hold the living after such a distinguished predecessor," said Jack.

"At any rate, you will not distinguish yourself in the same way," said Mrs. Frowde.

"There seems no chance of the living at

present," said Jack. "Mr. Voyd appears to be quite contented with his position."

Our friends all separated in the evening, and on the following day Diana and Claudia Selfe left the Cottage. Manly Frowde and his wife and dogs stood at the gate to see them off, and as they drove up the road they continually turned round and saw Manly Frowde still watching them and waving his handkerchief. As they were just going out of sight, they stopped for a moment and gave one last look, and then went on sadly. Was it a presentiment of anything to come that made them stay for a moment and fix on their minds the picture of the big, gentle, affectionate man, as he stood there with his wife and dogs by his side?

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LAST ACT.

He not only wrote poetry, but he made life a poem, and rejoiced if he was ever able to lead others to do the same. I should think no man ever worked harder in the profession of literature than he did, and yet he never seemed bored by it, or allowed others to share the weariness and anxiety which he must often have suffered. I cannot help dwelling upon this, because it was such a striking feature in his character, springing as it did from that deep religion in his soul, which made him feel that life was full of God, and therefore an unjoyous spirit was unworthy of true manliness.

A Lady's Letter.

"COMEDY meaneth sweet play in a village," was the first sentence of this story. The writer of that sentence of course took the literal meaning of Comedy.

The play, so far as the characters in this book are concerned, is nearly played out.

I would that the curtain could drop on the scene in the last chapter, or that it could rise again on even a pleasanter one.

Nearly two years have passed, and I should like to show Jack Sebright as Vicar of Copse Hill, with his beautiful Kate as his companion in his work.

I should like to show the village freed from gossip, at least from malicious gossip, and good feeling existing as of old, when Mr. Bonfellow was vicar.

I should like to show Manly Frowde still walking about in his old velvet coat and straw hat, with his ever-inseparable companions—his wife and dog. I should like to show pleasant meetings at his cottage, where everyone seemed free and happy.

But I can show none of these things.

Kate and Jack are happy, living in a

pleasant vicarage not very far from Ashton Minima—near enough to be within a day's drive.

Leonora and Frank travelled for some time after their marriage, and have now settled down in a country house which adjoins Lord Ravensbourne's estate. Lord Medway talks of his aunt with great pride.

Ralph has consoled himself with Mary, and they live in a lodge in the grounds. He still declines to acknowledge that women are necessary to a man's existence, but Mary manages him all the same.

Kate insists on calling her aunt mamma still, and as Leonora has just had a little boy, Kate declares she has got a brother.

William Temple often visits his daughter. He has given up Winterslow, and travels about from place to place.

Lord Arun has not yet found anyone whom he thinks as lovely as Kate, neither

has he yet learnt to put a sentence together.

While Harry Branscombe was wondering which he liked best, Diana or Claudia Selfe, another friend of Manly Frowde's took Diana away. So the wonderful pony that has done so much "shooling" with his mistresses, and the peerless dog, their constant companion, have now found a master. But Claudia declares that she will not give up her claim to a half share in the beloved pony and dog; so, if she marries, the question will become complicated.

These people are all happy, but in their happiness there is one shadow. There is one thing they all miss in their lives; something that makes them wish not to visit Copse Hill again. The little village may still look as beautiful to a stranger as it did to Frank Forncett and Harry Rivers on that October morning when they saw it from the top of the hill. The furze and

heather still bloom there. The burly landlord still waddles about, or falls asleep on the bench outside his inn. The sign of the Pleiades still hangs out in the road, inviting thirsty travellers to stop and take what Lord Ravensbourne's servants described as "beastly stuff."

There is Miss Tattleton, too, as buxom as ever, though her face is beginning to wear a less pleasing expression than it did. She is in a particularly bad temper just now, for she has been unsuccessful in "making a deal" with a cattle-dealer for her pigs, and she wanted the money for what she calls a "fiend" that is to call on her. She and the cattle-dealer have been standing by the pigstye for some quarter of an hour in a cold wind, and she has come in with a face-ache, and without having sold her pigs; so the next customer who goes in is rather to be pitied.

Old John still meanders across for his

glass of beer. The Vicar passes by with his saintly smile. "Old Uriah," as Miss Tattleton calls him, still occasionally "changes Sundays."

On rare occasions Mr. Bonfellow comes over to take the service, and everybody's face brightens at the sight of him. But what Harry Rivers called the "poetic spirit" of the place has gone. The strong, gentle Manly Frowde, whom everybody loved, is dead. He worked unceasingly and uncomplainingly, but his work was too great a strain upon him, and his heart ruptured. Afterwards, when his friends found how he had worked, they wished that they had known of it that they might have lightened his labour, but he never allowed anyone about him to feel that his work was too much for him.

The pretty cottage is deserted. The tall handsome figure can no more be seen wandering about or leaning over the gate, book

in hand. The magic of the place has gone. Therefore, though Copse Hill may still appear beautiful to a stranger, to Manly Frowde's friends it looks dull, and cold, and grey. But they cherish the memory of the kind, genial fellow, who, as one of them said, "was wont to greet them on the lawn at Copse Hill, and make a day spent there an idyll thereafter to be conspicuous amidst the prose of a work-a-day existence."

A few words concerning one of the writers of this story. The "Village Comedy" was commenced at midnight as the year eighteen hundred and seventy-five departed, and eighteen hundred and seventy-six came in. Mortimer Collins began with the following sonnet as a motto to the first chapter, but his coadjutor did not think it appropriate. It may now be of some interest:

Gone is the irrecoverable year,
With all its joy and trouble. January
Begins, and we, with courage gay and airy,
Begin a novel. It is pleasant here:
The midnight fire burns frostily and clear;
Soul-prompting Fantasy, the frolic fairy,
The poet's guide through regions of vagary,
Shows the vague sea o'er which we have to steer.
The Hero comes into our haunted room,
We see the lovely Lady's passionate grief,
As some foul scandal her fair bosom stirs;
The plausible Villain grins amid the gloom;
Then follow to our infinite relief
A motley multitude of villagers.

When the writers sat down that midnight to commence their story, they were full of hope and joy, of

" . . . courage gay and airy,"

though it is well known now how Mortimer Collins had to struggle for existence, and how much disappointment he suffered.

One writer now sits alone, and sadly finishes the story.

THE END.

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